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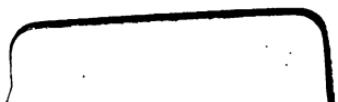
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# THE DAYS OF HIS VANITY.

A Passage in the Life of a Young Man.

BY  
SYDNEY GRUNDY.

"The days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow."—ECCLESIASTES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# THE DAYS OF HIS VANITY.

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## BOOK THE THIRD—*continued.*

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### CHAPTER V.

#### CHANGE.

“And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands.”—*Ecclesiastes.*

IT is always an anxious moment when, after an absence, we are about to meet again somebody we love. Of all the many terrible things in this most terrible life, there is nothing so terrible as change. That awful change, which is silently, deadlily working

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in us and about us every hour we live—that terrible velocity of time, which sweeps us onward through fresh thoughts and sympathies. We are none of us the same men now we were last month, last week. We are none of us the same women now we were a day, an hour ago. The things we could do yesterday we cannot do to-day. The love of to-day is the estrangement of to-morrow. We change our being every moment that we live.

The companion who is altogether ours—the sympathiser in our troubles, the partaker of our sufferings, the echo of our thoughts, may, if we do not see him for a month, be, when we meet again, the sympathiser with our enemies, the advocate of our opponents, the quibbler at our views. He may adopt the very policy which we had suffered and denounced together; though

nothing may have changed—but sympathy. The staff we lean upon may, once we let it fall, become the stumbling-block which throws us over.

It was with an anxious heart that Ernest found his way to Rosamond's apartments the next day. For how would she receive him? Would it be the old, old Rosamond? No, man, of course it won't; for is it not twelve months and more since last you saw her? Men change in months, but women in a day.

He sent his card up, but was not received immediately. A message was sent down that Miss O'Neill would see him presently. He knew that it was not the old, old Rosamond.

He sat and waited in a room below, and heard a sound of voices in the room above. Then a door opened, and he heard them say

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good-bye; and he was told that Miss O'Neill was now at liberty. He walked upstairs, and on the landing came full face with Harry Bonamy.

This man again! Was he to be his rival always? and to conquer always? Was there nothing in the world but curly hair and laughing eyes?

"Why, Ernest, what the dickens are *you* doing here?" cried Harry, gaily.

"What are *you*?" asked Ernest. It was no use trying to be civil; he could not.

"I came to call on Miss O'Neill," said Harry.

"So did I," said Ernest, and walked on.

The door was shut. She did not even open it, but called "Come in," when Ernest knocked.

Don't think that Rosamond was unkind, reader ; she had only changed. She was no different to you—if you're a woman.

"A merry Christmas to you, Mr. Tempest," she exclaimed, as Ernest walked into the room. For it was Christmas-day.

A jolly sort of greeting, as a rule ; but Ernest thought it was the dreariest that he had ever heard.

"Rosamond !" he cried, as if the old name might bring back the old associations and the old familiarity. But it was more than twelve months since.

"Not Rosamond," replied the girl, "but Miss O'Neill—or Nelly, if you like." But he did not like. He preferred to call her nothing.

She was quite the actress—the half-public person—somebody who was not

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quite a stranger, but almost, had called upon.

“We have been looking for you everywhere.”

“You, Mr. Tempest!”

“George and I.”

“Oh, how is George—dear old George?” inquired the actress, with some little interest. But even her slight interest in George seemed only to bring out into relief the absence of all interest in Ernest.

“He is well enough; but you have given him a great deal of anxiety.”

“I!” exclaimed Rosamond.

“Yes, you,” said Ernest; for her coldness was beginning to exasperate him. Yet, when he looked in that fair face—which had so perfected its beauty since he saw it last—and on that yellow hair, his heart was softened. A plain woman acting so would

have disgusted him; but beauty makes us all long-suffering. So weak are we, and so unjust is nature.

“Oh, I was right enough,” said Rosamond; as if, since she was right enough, anxiety was rather an impertinence.

“We didn’t know that,” observed Ernest.

“No, of course not,” she assented, after a short pause, as if that had not struck her.

“We were looking for you, high and low.”

“Good gracious!”

As she did not seem disposed to enter into the particulars of her experiences, Ernest did not ask her any questions. In truth, he felt quite sick at heart, and almost wished the interview were over. Miss O’Neill appeared to wish so too. Another pause succeeded.

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“Is there anything that I can do for you, Miss Vane?” at last asked Ernest, out of desperation.

“In what way?”

“In any way.” He meant in a pecuniary way.

“I don’t know that there is,” said Rosamond; and then, with the first flash of interest she had manifested, added quickly, “unless you could procure me an engagement at a London theatre.”

“You want to go to London?”

“Very much.”

“I am afraid I have no influence with London managers—or any other managers—so far as that goes—but I’ll see what I can do.”

“I should be so glad if you could.”

“What does she want to go to London for?” thought Ernest; but he dare not ask.

“I’ll try,” was all he said.

“How did you find me out?” asked Rosamond.

“By accident. I happened to be at the theatre last night, and recognised you when I heard you speak.”

“But what has brought you to this place at all?”

“My mother lives here. I was born here.” And Ernest almost cursed the place for bringing that event about.

“How very strange that I should have come to it.”

“It is strange.” Had she been more glad to see him, it would have been “providential.”

“You have come for Christmas?”

“Yes.”

“And I suppose you are not stopping long?”

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"Not very. I am going back to town next week."

She looked relieved. They're pleasant creatures, women.

"You've not had any of your plays out?"

"No."

Another long pause.

It was little wonder Harry always vanquished Ernest, in their rivalries. These pauses play the very deuce with love-making.

"I met Mr. Bonamy upon the stairs," said Ernest.

"Indeed?" said Rosamond.

"Have you known him long?"

"Some months."

"He's very lively, isn't he?"

"I like him very much."

"Yes, all the ladies do."

“ What ladies ?” inquired Rosamond : for Ernest had, at last, aroused her interest.

“ The sex, in general.”

“ But in particular ?”

“ Miss Grey, of course.”

“ Who is Miss Grey ?”

“ The lady whom he is engaged to.”

It was, perhaps, rather malicious of Ernest, who was not often malicious ; but both Rosamond and Harry had that morning sorely tried his patience. And to do him justice, he thought Rosamond must know about it—or at least, ought to do.

But he could not have said it, had he known the blow which he had given Rosamond. She was a woman, though ; and hid the pain which wrung her, so successfully that Ernest was relieved to see how little she was moved by the announcement. But it was as much as she could manage.

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“Ernest,” were her next words, “would you call again, and see me? I have a part to study now.”

It was the first time she had called him Ernest. When the new loves sting us, how our hearts recoil upon the old! So selfish are we.

“I beg your pardon, I am sure, for keeping you. I’d no idea you were busy,” he apologised.

“Good-bye,” said Rosamond. “You’ll give my love to George; and I am very much obliged to you for coming.”

“Good-bye,” said Ernest; and the door was closed behind him.

He went down the stairs with heavy tread, and closed the front door after him with a bang; and Rosamond prepared to study her next part. Her plan of study was peculiar. It was to throw herself

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upon her bed, and burst into a flood of tears.

As Ernest walked along, he met two ladies of the name of Spindler, whose acquaintance he had the honour of possessing. He took his hat off as he passed them, in the usual way ; but even in his moody state of mind, he could not help being struck by the extreme frigidity of their acknowledgment. The fact was, Ernest had been seen to call at Miss O'Neill's ; and the circumstance had been, by this time, published over the whole place. It was notorious that Harry called there frequently ; but that was of no account. Harry always was a scapegrace ; and there was nothing extraordinary in his calling on a pretty girl. But Ernest being a person of high character, the worst construction that the circumstance

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admitted of was promptly put upon it, and his reputation in Cornfield was ruined.

But he did not know the reason of the curious frigidity of the Misses Spindler, and he did not trouble himself long about it. He had more important matter on his mind. He could not banish from it the chill change in Rosamond's demeanour.

Amongst the little tragedies of life, there is nothing more shocking than the callousness of women. The truth, and faith, and constancy of woman is a proverb ; but, with notable exceptions, woman is prosaic, commonplace, and businesslike. She can be true, and faithful, and constant enough, if it suits her purpose ; if it doesn't, she cares no more for truth, and faith, and constancy, than she cares for anything else. A romantic man is an exceptional being ; but a romantic woman is a curiosity. In

poetry, the women love romance ; but in real life, they mean business. An ordinary woman is quite capable of dismissing a lover, who has been faithful and favoured for years, in half a dozen sentences ; or of putting an end to a love affair on three sides of a sheet of note paper.

It is one of the terrible things in life, this callous way in which a woman can change front in half an hour, and quench the passion of a life with just two words—“good-bye.” She whom to-day you deem your dearest friend, can calmly cut you in the street to-morrow. The opening of a woman’s letter is a crisis in a man’s life always ; for he can never tell if it will make him of all men the happiest, or blast his life for ever. It is a mere toss-up, whether it is “your devoted Nelly,” or “yours very truly, Ellen Thompson.”

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" Oh yes," exclaim the ladies, " that's all very well ; but men are just as bad. How fickle they are—how inconstant—and how faithless ! Don't they throw the women over ? Aren't they just as cruel, when it suits them ?" Doubtless, they are bad enough ; but even in their greatest cruelties, they are not so cold-blooded : and whereas the cruelty of men is the cruelty of individuals, the cruelty of women is the cruelty of a sex. Men are often cruel, but there is hardly a good-looking woman breathing whose usage of her lovers will bear scrutiny. It is perfectly natural that women should change : it is neither odious nor wrong : we live in a world of change. It is quite right that a woman should dismiss a lover, when she ceases to love him ; but she ought to do it kindly. It seems impossible, however, for a woman to put an end to a love

affair in a dignified and considerate manner. She seems always to get frightened, and to run away, and hide herself behind a hedge of coldness and formality ; and she is especially fond of doing the business through the medium of the post-office. Sooner than face the ordeal of a dignified and honest parting, she will stain her conscience with brutality. For women, under all their graces, virtues, and good qualities, are, as a sex, with only individual exceptions, arrant cowards. They are a score of sweet and noble things, afterwards ; but first of all, they are cowards. It is no fault of theirs ; for nature made them, before all things, weak ; and weakness is equivalent to cowardice.

But what has this to do with Rosamond ? She had never been in love with Ernest. No : but she had been a friend, and now

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she was a stranger : and it is the ease with which a woman can glide out of friendship into estrangement, which gives the sting alike to Rosamond's demeanour now towards Ernest, and to that general behaviour of her sex which we have been considering. It is the abrupt assumption of the tone of a stranger which is so unfeeling—their sudden treatment of the man, with whom they have for months been sharing every thought, as little more than an acquaintance. Men do more grievous wrongs than women : men may sometimes be as mean ; but the way in which women do their meannesses is more ignoble than the meannesses themselves.

The blunt, outspoken style in which they do them, without a vestige of emotion or a spark of shame, is quite a problem. People talk about their tact, and the delicate way

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in which they intimate their meaning, so as to inflict the least amount of pain. But the tact of a woman is only the tact of the drawing-room. It is only equal to the getting rid of a bore, or the extracting of a secret. Who is so businesslike as a woman, when there is any real business to be done? Who comes so plump and plain to the point, when there is a serious point to be come to? Take the sort of letter which a woman writes, in such a situation as the one which we have been considering — namely, when she wishes to get rid of an inconvenient lover. No business memorandum written in the city by a man, was ever so laconic and concise, as is the note with which a woman can dismiss a love she has enjoyed for years.

“DEAR MR. ROBINSON,—Papa thinks it

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would be so much better if we did not correspond. I write to say good-bye. I can never forget you, or cease to wish you every happiness ; but I cannot help agreeing with papa, that under the circumstances it is best that there should be no further communication between us. Good-bye, and God bless you.

“Yours very truly—”

Christian and surname.

“P.S.—I am going to be married.”

The words may be more prettily chosen, but the meaning is always the same. “Somebody else has turned up, and I want to be rid of you. I am perfectly aware that this letter will nearly kill you, but I hope you may be happy. Only don’t bother me any more, and if you like you may go to the devil. God bless you.”

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And as a rule, the man avails himself of the permission, and does go there.

Other men besides Pygmalion have found themselves in love with a stone.

To what must we attribute this insensibility of woman? I incline to think that it is nothing worse than poverty of the imagination. She is unable to conceive and realize the meaning and effect of her demeanour. I don't suppose that Rosamond had the least idea of the pain which she was giving Ernest. I don't suppose that women generally have the least idea of the pain which they are always giving men. It was a new experience for Ernest, and he did not like it; but it is one which most men have to go through. He has had a very mild attack. Instead of mourning to discover that a woman, where her own heart is not touched, is chill as ice, he

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ought to be thankful it has not been his lot to experience that she is “more bitter than death.”

But though the “gentle” sex be the more cruel, it is the weaker; and there cannot be a question which comes off the worse in the everlasting conflict which is going on between the two; and for the wrongs which women do to men, their sex may well be pardoned, when we think what it has suffered at the hands of ours. The woman who puts poison on the lips with which she kisses you, is sometimes crushed beneath an iron heel: and if she be not crushed, her sisters are.

Poor Rosamond had not done anything like this, but she was made to suffer. The pain which she had given Ernest was a trifle to the pain which Harry Bonamy had given her. It was a wretched, broken-

hearted girl who, at the next performance of the pantomime, came down from heaven in a blaze of limelight, dressed in cloth of gold.

## CHAPTER VI.

## MISS BRABANT.

"There is no end of all the people."—*Ecclesiastes*.

THE week passed by—that jolly Christmas week which it is such a relief to get over ; and Ernest found himself again in chambers. He went to see Rosamond a second time before he left Cornfield, and some of the old sympathy revived in her, but Ernest could not get over the dreadful change in her demeanour.

He got little comfort from philosophy, although it showed him that the world is

one of change, and that inconstancy is a necessity of life. In an existence which is subject to death, it must be so ; for, if we could not be inconstant to the dead, we should be always wretched. And the same with the departed and estranged. If it were not for inconstancy, life would not be endurable. It is a miserable truth : but truth is miserable. If we wish for comfort we must look for it in falsehood—and tobacco.

Ernest lit his pipe, and with a heavy heart resumed his writing. But he could not write. At the end of every sentence the old pain came back, and he was fain to dash the pen down, and resign himself to gloom.

Oh, lucky butchers, and bakers, and candlestick-makers, who can go on with your business, more or less, though your brains

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be boiling, and your hearts be bursting : who can continue meditating on those sorrows which will not be brushed aside, and go on with your occupation all the same. And oh, unhappy men, whose work requires clear heads and quiet nerves, who cannot mourn and labour.

He was still persevering with the drama, though his many failures had quite brushed the bloom of interest off that ambition. He had had plays read, accepted, cast, rehearsed, and advertised, but he had never had one acted. If he had had a chance, and failed upon the merits, he would have been satisfied, and taken to some other occupation, but he never had. His were two dreary callings—at the first—the drama and the bar. Those are dreary callings, in which a man has not the opportunity of showing what is in him, till the

edge of interest is blunted and the glory of enthusiasm faded: in which the opportunity comes only when he is dejected and disgusted past recovery. There is no restoring that original enthusiasm, the price of which is above rubies. Happiest those callings in which men can put their energy at once into their work, and can proclaim themselves at once incompetent or able; and in which, although they may not rise immediately, they have not the forlorn feeling that their talents are rusting and their genius decaying.

Ernest had long since abandoned managers. Such friends as he had made were actors. He had not flown very high; and kind as they were to him, they had not been able to assist him much. The thought had recently occurred to him that he might plume his pinions more ambitiously, and

just as well as not fly higher. He could but fail, and he was used to failure.

The star in the dramatic firmament just then was Miss Brabant—a tragic actress of great beauty and real genius. She had been a great success, partly because she was clever, partly because she was beautiful ; but principally because she was in the hands of men of business, who perceived that the dramatic instinct had a commercial as well as an artistic value, and who knew how to develop it. Miss Kate Brabant had made a little fortune in America, and was making many thousand pounds a year in England.

Being a tragic actress of established fame, she was about the most unlikely person in the world for an unknown young man to send a light comedietta to ; but everybody who has gone through life with his eyes

open, knows it is the certain shots which miss the mark, and it is the unlikely ones which hit it.

It was so in this case. Ernest got a note from Miss Brabant, upon the creamiest of note paper, embellished with the most ornate of crests, inviting him to come and see her at a certain time, when she would be most likely to be free from visitors.

At the appointed hour he found himself at the address engraved upon the note-paper. He pulled the letter out and looked at it again, for he could not believe that he was right. He had not much idea of Miss Brabant's pecuniary position, and he had imagined to himself a quiet tête-à-tête in lodgings much superior to Rosamond's but after the same pattern. Great was his astonishment to find himself before a handsome mansion, in the most genteel of Lon-

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don squares, adorned with ferneries and tesselated window-boxes, after the most fashionable style.

It was not without trepidation that he knocked and rang. The door was thrown wide open by a powdered footman, who surveyed him haughtily ; for Ernest's feeble knock had done his business with that functionary.

Was this Miss Brabant's ? Yes, that was Miss Brabant's. Was Miss Brabant in ? The functionary would ascertain. He showed our hero into a small ante-room, superbly furnished, and walked off with Ernest's card. Yes, Miss Brabant was in. Would Mr. Tempest step upstairs ?

He led the way along the thick, soft carpet, up the hall, and up a sweeping staircase, which led round by stained glass windows and recesses filled with statuary

to the drawing-room, and told him Miss Brabant would see him in a moment.

It was part of one large room, divided from the other part by pale blue curtains of the richest cloth, which opened in the middle. It was indeed a superb apartment, furnished in the most luxurious style, and crammed in every niche of space available with statuary, china, and artistic knick-knacks. The panellings upon the door and ceiling were themselves a study, and the fire-place was a picture in itself. The room was too magnificent—too full of furniture—too much embellished—for good taste; but that is so with the majority of London drawing-rooms.

Poor Ernest felt quite frightened. He was not accustomed to such grandeur, and his comedietta seemed a very small affair. But by-and-by his eyes got used to it, and

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he began to use his ears. He could distinguish voices on the other side of the blue curtains, and amongst them, rising rich and resonant above the rest, he recognised the voice of Miss Brabant. How odd it sounded, that familiar voice amidst those strange surroundings ! And then that ringing laugh, which he had never heard except upon the stage, how very singular it sounded there ! But there were several other voices. It was evident that Miss Brabant had visitors.

He wished she hadn't. He had expected that she wouldn't. She had said she thought she should be free from visitors about that time. But I should like to know the time when Miss Brabant *was* free from visitors. Her breakfast-room was full of them when she came down to breakfast, and from then till it was time to go upon

the stage the knocker never rested for five minutes together. She had to take them even to the theatre in her brougham, and another bevy of them — and by far the pleasantest—turned in to supper after she came home.

There was not one of the twelve posts a day that did not bring its batch of letters, and another batch awaited her at the stage-door. And if there wasn't a delivery on Sunday, the deliveries on Monday quite made up for it. It was a wonder she found time to answer Ernest's letter, but it had been introduced by one from Mr. Liverpool, which perhaps accounted for the special favour which had been accorded to it.

I have not said anything of manuscripts, but half-a-dozen five-act tragedies a week was quite an ordinary quantity. There was a little back room fitted up with shelves

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for their accommodation, which she termed the black-hole, and could never be induced to enter. The amount of murder done in that back room, and the innumerable corpses it contained—on paper—made a ghastly total.

Then there were the cards, and little notes, and messages which came by hand or word of mouth; and the requests for autographs demand a sentence to themselves. Indeed, dear reader, to be a popular actress has its inconveniences—to say nothing of rehearsals.

It was noticeable—and was very much noticed by the ladies at the next house—that these endless visitors were all of the male sex. In truth, Miss Brabant was not a favourite with the ladies. Her name had somehow got connected with some rather serious scandals. I need

hardly say that most of them were lies. The vague reports which were mysteriously whispered at the clubs about her having run away to the Continent with a German prince, when she was nightly to be seen by any member of the public willing to spend sixpence in a country town, were pure inventions. Still there were certain facts connected with Miss Kate Brabant which wanted explanation if she was to be received by ladies, and those explanations did not seem to be forthcoming. But though the ladies did not visit Miss Brabant, their absence did not seem to trouble her. It did, sometimes, for all that. Even actresses have hearts, and a woman with no female friend is always a lone being.

At last Ernest heard the well-known voice exclaim, "Excuse me for a moment, gentlemen;" and in a moment afterwards

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the curtains were pushed one upon each side, and the familiar figure flashed upon him. It was done in half a second. The familiar bright brown hair, and the familiar bright brown eyes, emerged quite suddenly ; and there the figure they belonged to stood, with each hand grasping the blue curtains, which had almost closed behind it. It was only for a second ; but the bright brown hair against the pale blue curtains, and the statuesque repose, were quite a picture. It was most dramatic. No wonder Miss Brabant got on : she was a clever girl.

Our hero was of course dumbfounded. He generally was. But in a moment Miss Brabant advanced, and holding out her hand, said with a bright smile,—“ How d’you do ?”

A common question ; but it was endowed

with quite a novel interest, from the tone that spoke it. To be asked how you do by the voice which says such pretty things to Romeo, and to be shaken hands with by the hand on which young Romeo would be a glove, that he might touch the cheek which smiles you welcome, is a curious sensation.

“Would you mind just coming in? I’ve got some people whom I can’t get rid of. I don’t think they’ll be long.”

This confidence was charming.

“You don’t mind waiting, do you?”

I should think he didn’t.

She led the way into the next division of the room, and putting Ernest in a seat, resumed her own.

Good gracious, what a change! Is that affected, simpering doll now making eyes at that young man with the light hair, the

glorious being Ernest heard two nights before, reciting Shakespere's noblest syllables, or the frank, smiling girl who asked him how he did, and shook hands with him half a minute since? It is the same; but with a difference.

Miss Brabant was one of those who thought it was as necessary to act off, as on, the stage, when she was entertaining visitors. She treated them as members of the public, who had got into a semi-private sort of a rehearsal, and expected to be ogled and gone on with. It was a great pity. It is always a great pity when a woman is not satisfied with being natural. But it had got into a habit with her, and appeared to be exceedingly agreeable to the half-dozen men who were assembled round her.

“ You look like a picture,” drawled the

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youth with the light hair. " You do, upon my word."

" You're paying me a very doubtful compliment, Lord Simon," simpered Miss Brabant.

" How so ?" inquired another man, with a thick head and nothing in it.

" Because it might mean I was painted."

This was so obviously the fact, that there was something almost heroic in Lord Simon's disregard for truth when he protested that nobody by any possibility could put such a construction on his words.

" And it might mean I was a flirt," continued Miss Brabant.

" I don't see that," remarked a military-looking man.

" Why, Captain Fitzroy, have you never noticed how a picture always seems to make

eyes at you, at whatever point you stand, and does the same to every one who looks at it?" And Miss Brabant immediately did the thing with which she charged the picture.

Captain Fitzroy had not noticed it.

"Have you, Lord Simon?"

No, Lord Simon hadn't. It would be difficult to say what Lord Simon *had* noticed in the course of his career upon the surface of the globe.

"But *you* have, Mr. Tempest?"

Ernest had been conscious that his turn was coming, for the brown eyes had been working his way round the room; and fairly quailed when they were fixed upon him. However, he *had* noticed something of the sort. Miss Brabant was "so glad somebody had noticed it," and swept the circle with an artificial smile.

Bang went the knocker down below,  
and soon up came the pasteboard.

“Ask them to wait,” said Miss Brabant; but still Lord Simon, Captain Fitzroy, and the rest, evinced no symptoms of departure.

“I’m going in the country in a few weeks,” she resumed.

A general exclamation of dismay escaped the company.

“I shall go too,” exclaimed the man with the thick head.

This speech was so good, everybody echoed it. They all would go too.

“Now I shall expect you. I shall expect to see you all at all my benefits,” said Miss Brabant.

“You’ll write and tell us when they are to be,” remarked the captain.

“No,” she answered, “you must follow me about.”

They all would follow her about. And so the conversation drivelled on.

Bang went the knocker, and up came the pasteboard.

“They must wait,” again said Miss Brabant.

As still Lord Simon and his party showed no signs of moving, Ernest rose, and said perhaps it would be more convenient if he called again.

“Oh, no,” exclaimed the actress, “not at all. These gentlemen are going directly.”

This was pretty broad, but it had no effect.

“Arranging for a *tête-à-tête* when we are gone. That’s too bad,” said the man with the thick head.

“Oh, very much too bad,” agreed his lordship.

"I shall stop here all the morning," declared Captain Fitzroy.

And it looked as if he would.

Bang went the everlasting knocker, and up came the perpetual pasteboard.

"I can't see them. Send them all away." And the admirers who had been in chivalrous attendance in the hall, were asked to call again.

The conversation dribbled on for half an hour, and Miss Brabant still smiled and ogled at her persecutors. Why she endured them, goodness knows; but suffer them she did.

At last Lord Simon said he thought she wanted to get rid of him, an observation which displayed much more perception than was usual on his part, but which Miss Brabant, with an affected smile, denied. However, she held out her hand,

and with innumerable farewell bows, and hand-squeezings, and ogles, and last words, and whispers, the whole party took their leave, and in a twinkling Miss Brabant was a changed being.

“Hang the fools!” exclaimed she, as the door closed after them, “I thought they’d never go.”

“I wonder you endure them,” remarked Ernest.

“Oh, it’s business,” she replied. “Well, come into my room. We can talk better there.”

Bang went the knocker.

“Here’s some one else,” said Ernest.

“I don’t mind who comes now,” she answered. “I am always ‘not at home,’ when I am in my room.”

She led the way across the landing into a boudoir more plainly furnished than the

other rooms, and having quite a business air about it, but still handsome, and more comfortable than the gorgeous grandeur they had left.

“No fools come in here,” said the actress, as she closed the door. “Isn’t that a compliment to you?” And they sat down.

“But how do you know I’m not one?”

“By your play.”

“I wonder you’ve found time to read it.”

“I do all my reading when I’m in bed. It is the only time that I am free from interruption.”

“And you read manuscripts to send you off to sleep?”

“I don’t read manuscripts.”

“I understood that you had read mine.”

“So I have; but why I read it, I don’t know. It’s quite against my rule. Did anybody introduce you?”

“Mr. Liverpool.”

“Oh, little Liverpool!” She had quite forgotten. “That’s why I read it, then.” And Miss Brabant smiled at the thought of him. It must be very nice to be a person other people smile to think of.

“What is your opinion of it?” faltered Ernest.

“Oh, I like the piece amazingly. Of course, it isn’t very much. It wouldn’t play more than fifty minutes. I dare say that’s a minute for each day it took to write it.”

“Not much more.”

“But it’s a good piece—lively—bright—and full of interest. Of course, you want it played?”

“There’s nothing I want more.”

“Well, what’ll you give me if I get it put upon the stage?”

“ My eternal gratitude.”

“ Oh, that’s too much. I’ll only ask you for a kind word every time you hear me badly spoken of.”

“ That I can promise you.”

“ We want a little afterpiece at the Pantheon, and I’ll make them play it. But who’s to play the heroine ?”

“ I don’t know.”

“ Of course, I couldn’t play in it myself.”

“ Of course not.” Although Ernest did not quite see why she shouldn’t.

“ I never play in afterpieces ; and I only play in Shakespeare.”

“ I know you don’t,” said Ernest, “ but I never can tell why.”

“ To maintain my reputation. If an actress wants to keep her name up, she must stick to Shakespeare.”

"But that's all bosh, you know," said Ernest.

"Of course it is," laughed Miss Brabant; "but then, it's bosh that pays."

"Well, who *can* play the heroine?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. She ought to be a pretty girl; but I'm the only pretty girl we have at the Pantheon. They tell me I take care of that." And Miss Brabant laughed merrily.

Ernest thought of Rosamond, and said he knew of some one in the country who, he thought, would suit it very well.

"Oh, ho!" cried Miss Brabant. "We know of some one in the country, do we? Oh, you naughty man!"

Ernest blushed, and looked absurd.

"You needn't be afraid of me, my dear," continued Miss Brabant. "I tell no tales. I've had too many told

about myself. Come, tell me, is she very pretty?"

"Very," he assured her.

"I can't do with her, you know, if she's too pretty. Is she dark or fair?"

"Fair."

"Come, that's better. If she had been dark I wouldn't have had her near me. As it is, she'll be a foil."

"You want no foil."

"Oh, yes, I do. There's nobody so handsome that she can neglect her frame. Where is she?"

"At Cornfield, in Yorkshire."

"What's her name?"

"O'Neill."

"And you'd be satisfied if she performed your heroine?"

"More than satisfied."

"My dear, you take care what you're

doing. You're in love. Oh, yes, you are. I saw it the first moment I set eyes on you. Well, I have been in love, too." And the actress suddenly grew serious, and added, almost in her tragic tone, "You take care what you're doing. Love is a mistake."

"I think it is."

"I'm sure of it." And Miss Brabant laughed—not the ringing laugh of half-a-minute since, but a forced, affected laugh, which is unpleasant in a man, but in a woman makes one's blood run cold. I should very much like to hear her version of those scandals which prevented ladies visiting her.

"You won't forget the name?"

"Dear me, how anxious you are over this young person. Never fear. I've written her address down; and as soon as we have heard from her the piece shall go into rehearsal."

“Do you really think they’ll play it?”

“They shall play it.”

“But the manager—isn’t there a manager?”

“Well, yes, there is a manager—but I manage. You shan’t be disappointed. There’s my hand upon it.”

“I can’t say how much I am obliged to you.”

“Then don’t; but speak of me as you have promised. As soon as ever we hear from your young friend I’ll write to you. And any time when you are passing this way, call and see me.”

“But you have so many callers——”

“That another won’t make any difference. Good-bye, my dear.”

“Good-bye.”

It was significant that Miss Brabant intended to do what she had arranged, and

looked upon it as a business matter, that she said "My dear." She had, as it were, taken Ernest into the profession, and entrusted to him its great pass-word.

Her brown eyes and hair came out with him upon the landing, and the ringing voice called after him, "Always glad to see you," as he vanished down the stairs.

Bang went the knocker, as he crossed the hall ; and the front door which let him out let in two more admirers of the popular tragedienne ; and in another minute, Miss Brabant was simpering and ogling in the drawing-room.

It was her life. There was, indeed, "no end of all the people." She lived a life of artificiality. She was one of those who are apparently triumphant, but to whom existence never really gave a chance. She never knew a mother, or a sister, or a real friend.

And if there ever is a day of judgment when this world's unfortunates will be admitted into bliss, should any of those scandals be brought up against her, it will be remembered on the other side that she was kind to Ernest when he needed kindness.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE REWARD OF VIRTUE.

“There is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity ; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein, shall he leave it for his portion”—*Ecclesiastes*.

DAY after day passed by, and still no word from Miss Brabant ; until at last Ernest began to believe that she was just as bad as all the rest, and that he had experienced another disappointment. It was no use standing at the window, watching for the postman, for he always took a pile of papers into Blenkinsop’s, and always walked past Ernest’s door. Sometimes he used to pull himself

up suddenly, just opposite, glance rapidly through half-a-dozen of the addresses, and—walk on. It is a cruel habit of the postman's. At last Ernest gave the matter up as a bad job, and determined not to watch the postman any more. The very next post brought the letter.

It was to say that Miss O'Neill had been communicated with, and had accepted the engagement, and requested Ernest's presence at the first rehearsal.

He had written to Rosamond some time before, and had expected by return of post a letter full of joy and gratitude ; but the return post only brought a bill. It was not until after he had heard from Miss Brabant that he received an answer. It was not a very hearty letter, but it was the kindest word that Rosamond had given him since he found her. And it was the first he had

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had from her. It began, "Dear Ernest," and apologised for her delay, upon the hackneyed plea of want of time and illness. Then she thanked him for his kindness in procuring the engagement for her, and assured him that it would give her a peculiar pleasure to make her first appearance in London in a piece of his. And it concluded with, "Believe me, my dear Ernest, your sincere friend, Rosamond."

It is a sacred document, that first letter from somebody we love. Somehow, however well we are acquainted with a person, we never feel that we quite know them till we know their handwriting, and see how they express themselves on paper. A person upon paper is a very different person to himself when he is not on paper. We seem to have a second identity in writing. The very characters and phrases which

we use are sometimes in themselves a revelation.

It is true there was not much revealed by Rosamond's epistle. It showed plainly enough that she had only a faint interest in Ernest, and that she was labouring under a painful sense that it was her duty to write to him more kindly than she felt inclined ; and that was about all.

Perhaps it was this difficulty which delayed the writing of the note. There are some letters it is very difficult to write ; and which when written convey just the contrary impression to the one we have endeavoured to produce. Sometimes the secret we have struggled to conceal is blazoned forth in almost every line ; but far more frequently the meaning we have striven to convey evaporates through the envelope, and the most frightful miscon-

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structions are imposed upon the words. Very few people can write letters, but nobody can read them. And amongst the little crimes of life—sometimes the little causes of gigantic consequences—there is no greater wickedness than passing about letters of one's own, and reading those of other people.

In a postscript to her letter, Rosamond had named the day when she was coming up to London ; and although she had not named the time—there being only one convenient train a day from Cornfield—that was easy to be guessed : and Ernest, with unusual gallantry, resolved to meet her at the train. He thought that he might be of some assistance to her in procuring lodgings and in looking after her. Poor Ernest ! It was all arranged already.

He was standing at the window on the

day in question, gazing at the fountain, and the sun, which was still shining on the river, waiting till the time arrived for going to the station, when he saw an old man coming out of Blenkinsop's. It was Mr. Furnival. He walked with a slow step and very doleful countenance across the court; when some one tapped him on the shoulder, and stopped talking to him. It was George.

As Ernest stood and watched, he could not help being struck by the bright face and jaunty manner of the surgeon; and contrasting his appearance with the stricken man who bowed his head beside the bed of Agnes Vane. It is too scathing, this irony of life. The griefs which smite us down and seem to be a pall upon our path for ever, lighten and disperse before the breaking day. Death is a clean-cut wound,

however deep. It leaves no poison in the blood.

Ernest had seen the surgeon several times since he had met with Rosamond, and of course George Drummond was delighted to hear all about her. But Ernest had been just a little shocked to see that even George's interest in her had abated; and there was in the surgeon's manner just a tinge of that insensibility which had dismayed him so in Rosamond. Oh, it is terrible, this time and change.

The surgeon said good-morning to the old attorney, and slipped on towards Ernest's door, came running lightly up the stairs, and stood inside the room.

"Well, what's old Furnival to say?" asked Ernest.

"You saw him, did you? He's been trying to persuade his counsel that it

wouldn't be a breach of trust for him to keep the money."

"But he failed."

"Egregiously."

"I shall begin to think old Blenkinsop deserves his practice soon."

"He says he must find out the father, or else put the thing in Chancery ; and Furnival appears to think he may as well resign the proceeds to the rightful owner as entrust them to the court."

"He should have done so long ago."

"But he professes he can't find him. I asked if I could help him ; but the old boy wouldn't hear of it."

"He must know who the father is."

"Of course he does—and I'll engage to say, could find him in a week if there was money to be paid instead of money to be

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handed over. Have you heard from Miss Brabant?"

"Yes, and from Rosamond. The piece is to be put into rehearsal in two days, and Rosamond is coming up to town to-day."

"To-day?"

"This afternoon. I'm going to meet her."

"Oh, indeed."

And that was all the interest George Drummond showed in Rosamond. No doubt, if she had been in difficulty or distress, he would have testified more feeling; but he was not of a romantic temperament, and being satisfied that she was earning a fair livelihood, he was content.

Ernest had half expected George would offer to accompany him, and was a little piqued at his indifference; for he forgot that George was not in love with her, that

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it was more than twelve months since he'd seen her ; and he did not make enough allowance for that numbing influence which a prosperous practice exercises upon all extraneous interests.

"I wonder where she will find lodgings."

"Oh," replied the surgeon, "there are lots of inexpensive places. I suppose we ought to find one for her—but really I've no time."

"You've time for nothing now, George."

"Except to come and see you now and then."

"But even then you're always in a hurry to be off. We never get a quiet pipe together now."

"The fact is, I've no time for quiet pipes. It's quite as much as I can do to get my work done."

"And that's 'getting on.' "

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Yes, George was “getting on,” and “getting on” is the ruin of good fellowship.

“There goes the hour,” cried George, as “oranges and lemons” tinkled towards them through the frosty air. “I must be off.”

“Well, off you go.”

“You’ll look after the lodgings, won’t you, Ernest?”

“I intend to do.”

“And when she’s settled down, you tell me; and we’ll go and smoke a pipe there some night, after she’s done acting.”

And the surgeon trotted down the stairs, considering that he had made all requisite arrangements about Rosamond. So great a change does “business” make in men.

How much depends upon a young man’s getting into business! If he gets into it early, how many risks and dangers he is

saved ; for young brains are very wild and must be doing something. On the other hand, how his ideas may be hampered and his really best prospects spoiled by being plunged too early in the gulf of toil ! How many fair careers have been destroyed by the involuntary idleness of early years ; how many geniuses have been ruined by being forced too soon into a groove !

Ernest had no business, and he had full leisure for his somewhat morbid thoughts to riot in his brain. He may have gained in wisdom, but he lost in happiness. His life had been a series of misfortunes—those misfortunes which men laugh at, and which perhaps are trifles, but which silently determine none the less the tone of a man's mind.

He was unlucky. His want of luck might certainly be traced, in some degree, to dis-

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position : for a thoughtful, silent, almost secret nature, is invariably unpopular. But he was an unlucky person too. There are some people who invariably fall upon their feet. The shares they purchase are as certain to go up as those which other people purchase to go down ; and they are generally fools. And there are people who invariably fall upon their heads and break them. The very liquor in their glass goes flat before the liquor in the glass of anybody else ; and they are generally wise men.

It was doleful work to smoke these idle years out, staring at the fountain ; and it seemed as if no great event would ever happen to change the course of them. The time for him to go and meet the train which Rosamond was coming by, appeared as if it never would arrive. But it did come at last, as everything else comes if we don't

die meantime, and off he started for King's Cross.

It was night now. The rails gleamed bright and clear, and the lamps sparkled in the frosty air. As far as he could see, red, green, and yellow lights glowed everywhere. He walked down the long platform, and stood looking out upon the tapering line, and watched the pointsman working in his shed, or rather sitting calmly with a newspaper; for everything was very quiet, and no trains were in the station.

It is always an experience of more or less suspense to be awaiting the arrival of a train. Even if it is not bringing anything that we particularly want, there is a something weird about the swift machine, which sweeps so suddenly into one's presence out of space, and changes the whole aspect of affairs in half a second. You look down

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the line, and cannot see a sign of it; and yet you may have scarcely turned your head before it is upon you. Expecting it is a continuous excitement. But when you don't know whether it is bringing what you want or not, nor with what feelings they whom you expect will greet you, the suspense becomes an agony.

It is one of many instances of the perversity of things that under circumstances such as these the train is always late. It was so upon this occasion. Ernest had to pace the great, long, silent platform twenty times. There were not half a dozen other people there, and not a porter was to be discovered. At a small refreshment bar upon the platform a young man was chatting gaily with the goddess who presided at the counter: everybody else was walking moodily about.

At last a porter came across the line out of the darkness, and clambered heavily upon the platform.

"How long will the Leeds express be?" Ernest asked.

"Five minutes," said the man. "She's twenty minutes late to-night."

That Leeds express was rushing through the country miles away, and yet the heavy porter knew exactly where it was and how long it would be.

There was nothing for it but to go on walking up and down, until it wanted only a few seconds to the end of the five minutes, when he took up his position by the signal-box and gazed into the night. A small bell ting'd, the pointsman laid aside his newspaper and seized a handle, and a signal dropped. A regiment of porters suddenly appeared from nowhere,

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and a low scream broke the stillness of the air. A rapid panting could be faintly heard, as of some giant in distress hard by. Then a light glowed upon him round a curve, a puff of steam obscured it, and the panting grew into quick, gasping sobs, which seemed to keep time with the beating of a heavy metal heart. The light came sweeping on. The rattle of the wheels was audible. The light flashed right into his eyes, a wildly working piston flew close past him, and the train rushed by: as though it could not possibly be stopped in time, but must go bang into the buffers at the end : when in ten seconds with a weary groan it pulled up dead within a yard of them.

It was in vain he tried to recognise the faces at the carriage windows as they glided by him; but on looking up the

train, when it had passed him, he distinctly saw the face of Rosamond. Her head was half out of the window, as if looking for him. His heart rose within him. She must have half expected him. How glad he was that he had come !

He hastened on to where he saw her face. Surely she recognised him, for she smiled and seemed quite pleased, although her eyes seemed scarcely to be looking at him. A porter then unlocked the door and she put out her hand. Then she *had* recognised him. He rushed forward to seize hold of it when it was taken by another hand, and he had only time to hide himself behind a pillar. For he saw that it was not him Rosamond had been expecting. It was Harry Bonamy.

It was Harry Bonamy who got her luggage from the van, and it was Harry

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Bonamy whom she rode off with in a cab.

The engine simmered quietly upon the rails and gently sighed, as if it felt relieved that it had done its toil, as Ernest passed it ; and the jolly faces of the driver and the stoker, smeared with black, were looking over its green side, in striking contrast to his own. He walked out into the black night and home.

It is too bad of life. The harvest one man sows, another reaps. It was through Ernest, Rosamond had come to London. It was he who had expected her with hope and with anxiety. It was Harry Bonamy, who had done nothing for her, and who did not want her, who received her. And it is always so.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *A SURPRISE.*

“That which is crooked cannot be made straight.”

*Ecclesiastes.*

“I’m very glad to see you, Bonamy,” exclaimed the jolly voice of Mr. Grey; as, for the third time that week, Mr. Bonamy appeared in the snug sitting-room.

The kettle was singing on the hob, the girls were busy with their fancy-work, another faded little lady was ensconced in the old corner, and Mrs. Grey was grumbling on the sofa. Everything was just as

usual; and the welcome was as warm as ever.

Mr. Bonamy made the customary inquiries after Mrs. Grey's health, and endeavoured to avoid the answers with his usual adroitness. When his toddy was mixed for him he indulged in the old joke, and it achieved the usual success.

"You look more bright than ever tonight, Bonamy," said Mr. Grey.

"Yes, doesn't he, papa?" exclaimed the girls.

"He's up to something."

"Yes, I'm up to something," chuckled Mr. Bonamy.

"Now I wonder what it is," sighed Mrs. Grey.

"Guess, girls," said their father. "You're both good at riddles."

"He has heard from Harry," suggested

Hester. It was now some weeks since Harry had been sent away.

“No, Edith gets all Harry’s letters,” replied Mr. Bonamy, a little ruefully: for Harry had not written to his father much.

“Then he writes very few,” said Edith.  
“I have not had many.”

“Only three a week,” remarked her sister.

“Guess again,” cried Mr. Grey.

They volunteered a number of solutions; but Mr. Bonamy shook his head at all of them.

“We give it up,” at last said Edith.

“Well, I’m going to London,” chuckled Mr. Bonamy.

“Going to London—when?” asked Mr. Grey.

“To-morrow.”

“For how long?”

“Oh, only for a day or two.”

“And what on earth have you to do in London?”

“Oh, I’m going on business.”

“You’re going to see Harry,” said the girls.

“Well, of course I shall see Harry while I’m there; but what I’m going upon is business.”

“You’ve made the business, you old humbug,” shouted Mr. Grey.

“Oh, how glad he will be!” exclaimed Hester.

“Does he know?” asked Edith.

“No, that’s the best of it. I’m going to take him by surprise!” And Mr. Bonamy’s face beamed all over.

“Oh, how nice!” agreed the girls.

Mrs. Grey thought it was a capital

idea, and Mr. Grey seemed to be rather taken with it, but Mr. Bonamy was full of it.

"I'm going to take him by surprise," he kept repeating. "By surprise! Just fancy Harry's face when I walk in!"

They all wished they could have a look at Harry's face when he was taken by surprise, and pictured it, and blessed him in their hearts for the delight which he would show. Ah, me!

Taking people by surprise! It is a favourite manœuvre. There is something dramatic about it which pleases the imagination; and when it is successful, it is triumphant indeed. But it is a fearful risk to run, and generally ends in failure more or less disastrous. It is a question whether the result is ever worth the loss of the anticipation. A great deal of trouble

and anxiety would often have been saved could the event have been foreseen, and it is always tempting Providence. To take a person by surprise to whom we are indifferent is an imprudence ; but so to take a person whom we love is to stake all our happiness upon a wanton throw. If fortune has been kind enough to let us dwell in paradise, let us thank fortune and remain there. Don't let us go testing it and scrutinizing it, or we may find that it is only a fool's paradise. Don't let us think we are well rid of it if that is all it is. We can't afford to think so, for all paradeses are fool's paradeses more or less.

But Mr. Bonamy had lived some fifty years upon this earth, and had not learnt this very rudimentary lesson ; and he chuckled like a schoolboy at the thought of taking Harry by surprise. Well, he

must go his own way. He will have to bear the consequences.

After the assembly had sucked all the honey out of this idea, the card-table was wheeled into position, and a rubber was proposed. Both Hester and Edith were fairplayers, and the gentlemen were settling down to a delightful game, when Mrs. Grey threw her usual damper over the proceedings by announcing that she wished to take a hand. The gentlemen looked rather glum at this, but it was not a thing they could object to, so the table was wheeled up against the sofa. Imagine playing whist with some one who is lying on a sofa!

Mrs. Grey was one of those objectionable players who invariably have the most profound and elaborate reasons for putting down the wrong cards. She never played correctly, save by accident—when she was

not attending, or mistook a card ; but she had always the most cogent reasons for the play which lost the game. They cut for partners, and she fell to Mr. Bonamy. Mr. Grey laughed.

" Shilling points, eh, Bonamy !"

" No, threepenny," said Mr. Bonamy. And Hester laughed.

" What are you laughing at ?" asked Mrs. Grey.

" Oh, she's a giddy girl," he answered.  
" Never mind her. Play."

And Hester led off trumps. The trick was taken by a card of Mrs. Grey's, who most obligingly returned her daughter's lead. The trumps were promptly drawn by Hester, who ran out with a long suit, and scored a treble.

" What did you return her lead for ?" inquired Mr. Bonamy.

"I had such a fine suit of hearts. I thought if I could only get trumps out—"

"But that was her game."

"It was mine as well. Her game just suited me."

"You only had three trumps."

"I'd four," said Mrs. Grey.

"And I had six," said Hester.

"But how was I to know that? Just because it hasn't been successful I am charged with playing wrong. But I shall always play the proper game, whatever the result is."

"You played wrong," said Mr. Grey.

"You can't expect to get trumps out with only four against a trump lead. Always lead from your strong suit," insisted Mr. Bonamy. "Come, play."

"I'm quite aware that I ought, as a general rule, to lead from my strong suit.

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It's what I always do," said Mrs. Grey, leading off an odd card with five trumps in her hand.

The trick was taken by the other side ; and Mr. Grey and Hester, who had only two trumps each, established a cross-ruff, and stole the odd trick in the face of the nine trumps against them, which all tumbled on the top of one another at the end.

" There now !" ejaculated Mrs. Grey, "if I had led trumps it would have been ever so much better."

" You *ought* to have lead trumps," roared Mr. Bonamy.

" Just now you blew me up for leading them," whined Mrs. Grey. " There is no satisfying you."

" You led off an odd card."

" I had a reason for it."

" What reason could you have ?"

"Well, I expected you to take the trick, and give me back my lead, and then I should have made a little trump ——"

"And ruined your trump hand. You ought to have led trumps, and then they couldn't have established that cross-ruff."

"But how was I to tell that they were going to establish a cross-ruff? Of course, it's very easy to be wise when it's all over."

"Not so very easy it would seem," said Mr. Grey.

"Of course, everything I do is wrong," complained the lady, "but I don't care. I shall play the game."

"Well, play then," thundered Mr. Bonamy; and Mrs. Grey's next play just lost the rubber.

"Give you your revenge," laughed Mr. Grey.

"No, thank you, Grey," said Mr. Bonamy.

“I’m not of a revengeful disposition.” But it took a very heavy brew of whiskey punch compounded jointly by the girls to bring back Mr. Bonamy’s good humour.

“Well,” said Mrs. Grey, “we’ve had a very pleasant game, and if we haven’t won it hasn’t been our fault at any rate.”

The girls played and sang to Mr. Bonamy, but nothing seemed to reconcile him till the conversation again turned on Harry, when he brightened up and left the house as chirrupy as ever.

“Give my love to him,” said Mr. Grey.

“And mine,” said Mrs. Grey.

“And mine,” said both the girls,

“Won’t he be pleased to see me?” chuckled Mr. Bonamy. “Just fancy taking Harry by surprise!”

He chuckled all the way home, and he chuckled all the way to London the next

day, thinking how, every time the wheels went round, they brought him nearer to the lad he loved. Foolish old man, he was in paradise—fool's paradise perhaps, but paradise. Why didn't he stop there?

Ernest heard no more from Rosamond, and did not feel that he was justified in ascertaining facts about her which she did not choose to volunteer. Accordingly, he did not even know where she was lodging. No doubt Harry knew, but Ernest never saw him. They had known each other all their lives, and were alone in London, but they had no tastes in common, and neither of them seemed to care for the society of the other. He was not therefore able to inform the surgeon where she lived, and the first time he met her was at the rehearsal of his piece.

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A first rehearsal is a very dreary business, and Ernest was dismayed to find how all the point had vanished from his witticisms, how tedious were his ingenious situations, and how all the interest of his story had evaporated. There was an old man playing in it who was not acquainted with a single word set down for him, and whose share in the rehearsal was confined to the continual reiteration of the opinion that the piece would certainly be damned.

"It won't be your fault if it isn't," Miss Brabant had told him, for she was so kind as to be present at the first rehearsal, and assumed a general direction of affairs.

"It won't be anybody's fault except the author's," answered the old man. "The dialogue is dull."

"I don't think your opinion of the dialogue is worth much," Miss Brabant re-

torted, "considering you are not acquainted with a word of it."

"I shall be all right upon the night. But mark my words, sir, your piece will be damned."

And sitting by the prompter, looking on at its first presentation to a couple of stagecarpenters, the author felt that whether it was damned or not it ought to be.

It seemed to him that Rosamond went through her part as well as any of them, but Miss Brabant appeared dissatisfied.

"I'm frightened of this girl," she said to Ernest, afterwards. "She's pretty—very pretty—I don't wonder you admire her. Oh, yes, you do—it's no use looking like that—I know all about it. But I'm terribly afraid that she'll break down."

"I thought she did as well as anybody else," said Ernest.

“No, my dear,” persisted Miss Brabant. “She put in all she knew. The others put in nothing. They’ll be right enough upon the night. You’ll hardly know them. That is if old Potter will be good enough to learn his part, which I’m afraid he won’t, for he doesn’t like it. But that girl of yours will be too nervous to do anything. She’s dreadfully inexperienced.”

“I’m sorry you think so.”

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do: I’ll take her home with me, and give her a good drilling. I’ll go through the part with her in my room.”

“You are too good, Miss Brabant.”

“Not good at all, my dear boy. I’m a regular bad one. You ask anybody. But I’ll help you all I can. Why shouldn’t I?”

“But why should you?”

“Because I wanted helping myself once,

and I had nobody to do it, and I know what it is. And for another thing, because I like you. You don't squeeze my hand, and make eyes at me, and expect to be made eyes at, and you don't know what a relief it is to meet a man of that sort."

"I thought you liked the other sort," said Ernest.

"Like them!" bellowed Miss Brabant. "Man, I could kill them!" And she set her white teeth, and her brown eyes glared and her hands clenched like one possessed, when suddenly she broke into a silvery laugh and made eyes at a passing scene-shifter.

"You're a queer one," remarked Ernest.

"Every man's heart I break, I give God thanks. Devils!" shrieked Miss Brabant. "But this isn't business, is it? That girl murders her best speech. She ought to say

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it this way." And she rushed upon the empty stage, and her rich voice rolled out the speech, in accents that reverberated through the house.

"Good gracious!" Ernest thought, "are those words mine?"

Yes, they were his, transfigured by the genius with which God had glorified this lost woman.

"Why, you know the part!"

"Every word of it," said Miss Brabant.

And so she did. She had only read it twice, and stood beside the wing at one rehearsal, and she could repeat it from the first word to the last.

"Well, I must go, my dear. I mustn't keep Lord Simon waiting. He is going to take me to a flower-show. Are you going my way? But no, on second thoughts, it wouldn't do you any good to be seen

riding in my brougham. I won't forget to give O'Neill a lesson. Ta-ta!" and she tripped off through the side-scenes.

"Good-bye, my dears," she called out, and she kissed her hand to half-a-dozen carpenters who were accumulated in a corner, as she passed.

"Good-morning, miss," they said respectfully.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said to the stage-doorkeeper as she went through, and jumped into her brougham and drove off.

A strange proceeding on the part of Miss Brabant, considering that all the carpenters had wives and families, and the stage-door-keeper the largest wife of all ; but it meant nothing except kindness, and there was not one of them who would not willingly have worked his fingers to the bone to serve her ; and there was scarcely one of all those

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wives and families but knew her and respected her, and loved her, and had reason.

Mr. Bonamy arrived in London by the train which had brought Rosamond some days before, and drove at once to his hotel. He chuckled all the way, and he was chuckling when he got out of the cab. Even the boots who took his luggage could not help but notice what a jolly, radiant old gentleman he was ; for boots are not so used to jolly, radiant old gentlemen as they are to surly, cadaverous old curmudgeons, who are not satisfied with anything, and seem to think that their peculiar fads and fancies ought to be intuitively guessed by those who serve them.

“ Got a vacant room ?” asked Mr. Bonamy.

“ I’ll try and find one,” said the boots ;

and he did find one, though the house was very full.

"I won't go up just now," said Mr. Bonamy. "I have to see a gentleman; but you can put my bag there. What's the number?"

"Fifty-nine, sir."

Mr. Bonamy went in and washed his hands, and made his face more radiant than ever, at the lavatory; and not waiting to get anything to eat, set off at once in search of Harry's lodgings.

Didn't he chuckle as he walked along? The people turned and looked at him, he chuckled so. But what did he care for the people? Wasn't he going to see Harry? And he pictured the surprise on Harry's face when he set eyes on him, and thought that he could hear his frank voice welcoming him. So he chuckled on.

He thought he saw an end of all his troubles. Harry had not written often, but had written very dutifully when he wrote at all. He had sown all his wild oats now, and he was living quietly and soberly, attending to his business. Mr. Bonamy thought what a good report of him he should take back to Yorkshire ; and how Mr. Grey would perhaps insist on the engagement being carried out at once ; and how his son would settle down into a sober married man, and live beside his father.

But by this time he had chuckled his way right into the street from which the letters had been dated, and was looking for the number on the doors. At last he found it, and knocked lustily.

There was no answer for a long time ; but at last a servant-girl appeared, and opened the door cautiously.

“Does Mr. Bonamy live here?”

“No, Mr. Bonamy does not.”

“You must be wrong, girl. Look ; here are his letters—all addressed from here.”

“Yes, Mr. Bonamy wrote letters there sometimes ; and they took letters in for Mr. Bonamy ; and Mr. Bonamy slept there occasionally ; but he didn’t live there.”

“Then where does he live ?”

The servant hesitated.

“I don’t know whether I ought to tell you, sir.”

“Of course you ought to tell me. I’m not going to eat him.”

Mr. Bonamy looked such a jolly, innocent old party, that the servant thought there couldn’t be any harm in telling him ; and so she gave him the address.

“This is a queer arrangement,” muttered Mr. Bonamy, as he went off in search of it.

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The gilt was rubbed off the surprise already ; for they're nothing—these surprises—unless they come off with a bang.

It was a long time before he found the new address. In the first place, it was some distance off; and in the second, there was something strange about the thing, which took the spring out of the old man's step, and stopped the chuckling. What could be the meaning of it ? Oh, it was a trifle. Harry would explain it in two minutes. Hallo ! here he was at the address.

It was a comfortable-looking house ; but all the blinds were drawn, and nothing could be seen of the interior. He rang the bell, knocked—not quite so briskly as before, perhaps, but cheerily. A neat, good-tempered servant came in answer to the bell.

“ Is Mr. Bonamy in ?”

“ No, sir, he's not.” Oh, these surprises!

"He lives here, doesn't he?" asked Mr. Bonamy, quite crestfallen.

"Oh, yes, sir; but he's just gone out."

"Not in, eh?"

"Mrs. Bonamy is in, sir," said the servant.

"Who?" exclaimed the father.

"Mrs. Bonamy. Shall I take your name in?"

"No; it's of no consequence."

And Mr. Bonamy slunk back to his hotel.

"What number did you say my room was?" he inquired of boots, who happened to be standing in the hall.

"Did you engage a room, sir?"

"Yes; wasn't it fifty-nine?"

"Oh, fifty-nine, sir. Yes, sir. I beg pardon; I didn't recognise you."

And he well might not. It was a very

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different gentleman who crept upstairs that night, and took the earliest train for Yorkshire the next morning.

Ah, Mr. Bonamy, perhaps another time you won't take people by surprise.

## CHAPTER IX.

## A FIRST NIGHT.

“This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.”—*Ecclesiastes*.

A FIRST night ! There is an aroma about the very words. Do we not seem to see the brilliant theatre and the glittering lights—the brilliant audience, which is there no other night ? Do we not seem to feel that strange electrical excitement which pervades the air ? Can we not see the well-known faces of the critics in the stalls —the well-known faces of the actresses and actors, who have somehow snatched an hour

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from their engagements, and contrived to put in an appearance—the fair faces in the boxes smiling at fair faces in the stalls—everybody seeming to know everybody else, and all on the best terms with one another and themselves ? There is not such another night. The very gas appears to burn more brightly, and the music is more resonant.

Ernest's was a very little piece, but he was a new author ; and new authors were not then so plentiful as now. Now they are rare enough—too rare, by far—but then, when what few theatres there were were in the hands of Mr. Baker, Mr. Cooke, and half a dozen others, who had conscientious objections to new authors, the production of the smallest piece by a new man was an event indeed. To this event was added in the present case the first appearance of an actress new to London, and a

crowded house had gathered to do honour to the night.

There had been a time when this would have thrilled Ernest through and through. The very bills upon the walls, and the advertisements in the newspapers, would have been meat and drink to him. Alas, that time had gone. The gilt had been rubbed off the gingerbread. He had endured too many disappointments to be much elated now. There was not anything romantic in the business ; it was all prosaic work. He knew his piece was not being played upon its merits. He was conscious that the management would not have listened to it if it had not been for Miss Brabant. He knew that Miss Brabant would not have looked at it if he had not been introduced to her by Mr. Liverpool. He knew that Mr. Liverpool would not have introduced

him if he had not met him at the club. He knew that he should not have been a member of the club if Mr. Cooke had not proposed him from an interested motive. It was all chance, based upon a slight foundation of dishonour, as is most success.

Still there was a certain element of excitement about it, and a very considerable element of anxiety and nervousness. It is not every man's work which will bear to be played after such a piece as *As You Like It*, which was the comedy appointed for the night. However, luckily, the critics did not come in until that was nearly over—although they criticised it slightly in their notices next morning—so the anti-climax would not strike them.

Miss Brabant, inspired by the full house and the excitement of the night, played splendidly, and was applauded to the echo.

As Ernest stood and watched her from the wing he could not think that it was the same being he had seen exchanging sheep's eyes with Lord Simon and the man with the thick head. Was this superb creature the woman whom the ladies would not visit ? He felt quite proud to know her ; and when, after the "counterfeiting," she was led off by Oliver and Celia, and held her hand out to him to be shaken, while the plaudits were still ringing through the house, it seemed like a divinity who smiled at him. But it was not. It was a woman with quite an exceptional amount of human nature about her.

" Well, how d'you feel ?" she asked him.

" Rather nervous," he replied.

" Why, you're as white as a sheet. Man, go and get a nip of brandy, or I shall have you to nurse, as well as O'Neill."

“Oh, I shall be all right.”

“But, my dear, where’s your dress-coat, crush-hat, patent leathers, and all the rest of it? You can’t present yourself before the audience in that plight.”

“I’m not going to present myself before the audience.”

“Oh, you’re making your mind up for a failure, are you? Well, I’m not. And I mean you to have a call.”

“I’m never going before the curtain.”

“Aren’t you? Wait a bit. You shall go, even in that suit of ditto, though I have to push you on.”

“We’ll see.”

“We will see.”

“Perhaps nobody will want me.”

“The more reason you should go, and get it in the papers. But I am so frightened of that girl. I think I’ve

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given her an idea or two, but she's so nervous she makes me as bad."

Miss Brabant had kept her promise. She had taken Nelly to her house on more than one occasion, and had given her several lessons in the little room; "but after all," she said, "I shall be very much relieved if she forgets my lessons, and is able to repeat your words."

The play proceeded, and at last the time came for the epilogue. Miss Brabant advanced, and spoke it in a style which made it very difficult for Rosamond to follow. Ting went the prompter's bell, and down the curtain ran. There was a glorious call, and Miss Brabant emerged from her triumphant passage before the foot-lights smothered in bouquets.

And then the actress dropped, and the good woman and kind friend whom God

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had made and only man had spoilt, replaced her. Flinging the bouquets into the arms of the first person that she met, she rushed into her dressing-room, threw off the bridal dress of Rosalind, let down her hair, and put on a loose dressing-gown, and ran along the passage to the room which had been given Rosamond.

A buzz of conversation and excitement penetrated through the curtain from the front, and the scene-shifters on the stage were busily engaged in setting Ernest's scene. The author wandered nervously about amidst the desolation of old canvases and properties behind, and the fiddlers began to tune up for the overture.

The first of Ernest's characters to put in an appearance was the disagreeable old man. He came moodily downstairs, in costume for the part.

“Mark my words, sir,” said the old man, “your piece will be damned.”

This was not re-assuring ; and the worst of it was that the old man had the best of reasons for his prophecy ; for when the actor who has one of the chief parts has not the least idea what he is going to say, a piece does run some risk of failure.

The old man gave no reason though for his opinion, but sat down on a recumbent side-scene, and stolidly awaited the rising of the curtain.

Miss Brabant, who had been up and downstairs twenty times already, looking after everything and everybody, now came tearing up to Ernest, with the dressing-gown in the most open state—and making revelations, the extent of which she neither knew nor cared—and with her dark brown hair here, there, and everywhere, and cried,

"I've just been peeping through the curtain. There's old Growler, of the *Critic*, just come in, as black as thunder. I'm sure his dinner's disagreed with him. The beast ! I was in hopes he'd send his deputy —a nice young man I'd made things right with." And then off she rushed again upstairs to Rosamond.

The audience were now beginning to get clamorous, and the orchestra struck up the overture. The scene was nearly set, and the furniture was being put into its place.

Then Rosamond appeared, leaning on the arm of Miss Brabant, who kept continually kissing her, and telling her it would be all right when she once got going. She looked superb in her new dress, and painted and fixed up by Miss Brabant's own hands. Her fair face, by

the side of the dark beauty whose wild eyes were fixed upon her anxiously, looked perfect. It was a pity that the two were not going on together.

“ What a Celia she would make for me!” thought Miss Brabant, with pardonable selfishness.

But she was terribly nervous. The poor girl’s hands shook so she could not hold the vinaigrette which Miss Brabant kept putting to her nose, and her voice trembled so that she could hardly speak.

“ Oh, it’s all up,” remarked the disagreeable old man. “ The piece is going to be damned.”

“ Shut up, you fool !” said Miss Brabant. Was this the charming Rosalind of ten minutes since ?

“ The first round of applause will put you all right, dear,” resumed the actress.

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"The piece is going to be a great success." But her anxious looks belied her assertion.

"Will there be a first round?" stammered Rosamond.

"Of course there will. Your looks will settle that."

"I wish it was all over," sighed the wretched girl.

"So do I," thought Miss Brabant.

The overture was now concluded, and the curtain rose.

The old man had to start the piece. He had a short soliloquy. The author paced the wings in a fever of agitation. Why didn't the old man begin? There he was upon the stage. Why didn't he cease his damnable faces, and begin? For a very good reason: that he didn't know what to say. At last he opened tongue. Ten thousand horrors! He began with a soli-

loquy of his own. The feeble words fell on the hushed house, in a deadly silence. Old Potter didn't know a single word of his part, and was inventing as he went along.

"Why doesn't he give me my cue?" groaned the leading young man, who was to be next upon the scene.

The prompter hissed the words, in vain, at the insensate Potter. He either could not or else would not hear.

"Go on," cried Miss Brabant to the young man. "Go on. He must be stopped at any cost."

"But I can't go on without my cue. I have to take it up," expostulated the young man.

"Go on, at any cost," repeated she.

And so the young man shouted out his cue himself; and took it up and rushed upon the stage.

“ Damn’d bad beginning,” grunted Growler to his next-door neighbour in the stalls.

“ Terrible,” replied the neighbour, who was another critic.

A short scene followed between the old man and the young, in which the young man had to take up all the old man’s speeches. But as the old man didn’t say his speeches, the young man had to say them for him, and then take them up, which rather spoilt the scene.

“ Forced wit,” said Growler.

“ Most artificial,” said his neighbour.

The young man gave the cue for Rosamond ; and Miss Brabant, with one tremendous last kiss, launched her on the stage. A round of complimentary applause greeted Miss O’Neill’s appearance ; which deepened into a sincere ovation when it was

perceived that she was beautiful. This steadied her a little, and she got through her first lines with the young man with tolerable credit; but when the old man had again to join the conversation, his absolute ignorance of his part put her out sadly; and it was as much as she could do to struggle on.

Miss Brabant encouraged her with every imaginable kind of nod, and wink, and gesture, from the wing; and ultimately the time came for the old man to make his exit.

“Thank heaven we’re rid of Potter for a while!” cried Miss Brabant. “You brute,” she said to him, as he came off, “you haven’t learnt a word of it!”

“I’m letter-perfect, Miss Brabant,” retorted the old man.

Relieved of this incubus, the piece righted

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itself wonderfully ; and Miss O'Neill and the young man, and several others, kept it going swimmingly. That peculiar heaving of the audience which, when a piece is “going,” can be heard to rise and fall in sympathy, began to be perceptible ; and Rosamond got safely through her exit, amidst some applause.

Miss Brabant was with her in a moment, nursing her and giving her all sorts of praises and encouragements, and administering mysterious restoratives and beverages, like a second sponging his principal between the rounds.

Alas, the old man was again upon the stage ; the murmur ceased ; the piece flopped down again, and all the actors were in difficulties. But when Rosamond again appeared, with better confidence, her knowledge of her words inspired the rest with

spirit ; and in spite of the old man the piece was again floated and began to make some way.

At length the time arrived for her great speech. Miss Brabant clutched hold of Ernest, in a fever of excitement, and cried, “Oh, if I might only go right on, and say it for her, I could save the piece yet !” She put her arms round Ernest’s neck and fairly hugged him, in her agony of terror. An old gentleman who could just see them from a side-box thought there were some curious goings-on behind the scenes.

Rosamond pulled through amazingly. She managed to deliver the long speech with quite a spirit, and a round of genuine applause was her reward.

“By Jove, the girl has something in her after all,” cried Miss Brabant. “I wouldn’t have believed it. I congratulate you, dear. Your piece is saved.”

"Old Potter has some more to do yet," answered Ernest, apprehensively.

"I don't care what he does," returned the actress. "The piece will not be damned now."

And it wasn't. The old man did his very best to ruin it; but it had taken a fair hold upon the audience, and it kept it; till the bell at last ting'd, and the curtain fell.

"You must go on," said Miss Brabant.

"I shan't indeed," said Ernest.

"But you must. Look here. If you go on alone, you'll get a slight round. If I take you on, you'll get a good one." And in an instant she was flying to her dressing-room.

Before the actors had all made their customary bow before the curtain, she was down again — another being — painted,

dressed, and ready to go on. It was impossible for Ernest to refuse her. So she took him on ; and dressed in ditto as he was, he had to cross the front. Now this was very kind of Miss Brabant; for the applause which her appearance always could command, appeared to fall on Ernest. It was judicious, too.. She was a clever girl.

“ Well,” she exclaimed, when they got back into the green-room, “ we may say that we have had a fair success. Now I must see after the advertisement. Of course it must be advertised as a tremendous triumph.” And Miss Brabant sat down to write out the advertisement.

“ Well, Mr. Potter,” remarked Ernest to the disagreeable old man, who had put off his things and just come down. “ You see, my piece has not been damned.”

“ No,” said the old man; “ but it was as

much as I could do to pull it through.” And Mr. Potter positively thought that he had saved the piece.

When Ernest got to the stage-door he found that Rosamond had already gone ; and as he stood upon the steps, regarding Miss Brabant’s big brougham-horse, which champed its bit impatiently, that lady, in her ordinary costume, jumped into the brougham.

“Good-night, my dear,” she said to Ernest, holding out her hand, before the footman closed the carriage-door.

“Good-night,” he answered, “and a thousand thanks for all your kindness, Miss Brabant.”

“Oh, not at all,” she laughed ; “I’d do that much for anybody. You’ll come and see me now and then ; and don’t forget your promise.”

The footman mounted on the box, she kissed her hand, and off the brougham rolled. The lamp above the stage-door threw its light inside the carriage as it rolled away ; and Ernest saw the outline of a man in the far corner. It was Lord Simon.

The next morning Ernest found in all the newspapers a most elaborate advertisement. “Great success of the new comedietta !” “Triumphant first appearance of Miss Nelly O’Neill !” “Seats must be secured in advance !” “The hit of the season !” &c., &c. He felt that this was an exaggeration ; but he was well satisfied with the result. The piece had taken with the public ; and would take still better when Mr. Potter got a glimmering idea of his part. It had certainly been more successful than a little

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opening piece, by the celebrated Tinker, which had preceded *As You Like It*, and which fell quite flat. Upon the whole he thought that he had been successful.

But he was reckoning without his host. There are such things as critics in this world ; and the influence they wield is perfectly tremendous. It is marvellous how people will accept the judgment of their favourite newspaper, and to the very letter. Criticisms are most useful, but, like all literature, they want brains in the reader as well as brains in the writer. To accept a criticism as a final judgment is the act of a fool. A sensible man uses the judgment of a critic only as a means of forming a judgment of his own. The most adverse criticism in the world may satisfy a sensible man of the merit of the subject which is denounced ; and the most eulogistic, of the

worthlessness of what is lauded. But the public seems to swallow praise and blame in lumps ; and it is ludicrous to watch it patiently enduring stuff that bores its very life out, just because the critics have pronounced it good.

The public often tolerates poor work, and even likes it ; but the public never yet rejected merit fairly placed before it. The critics do so every day, but not the public. And when good work fails, it is because it does not get before the public properly, or is presented in a form which is unsuitable. But if the newspapers condemn a book or play, it never gets before the public, for the public will not look at it, and hence the critic's power.

The criticisms upon Ernest's piece did not appear until the following day. It will be understood how anxiously he looked for

them. It felt very strange to run his eye along them, and to see in juxtaposition to the parliamentary reports, and the latest news from the East, and all sorts of imperial news, the familiar words, "Ernest Tempest," "Miss O'Neill," and so forth. And with that comprehensive glance with which we sweep a paragraph in which our interests are involved before we read it steadily, although he only saw a few disjointed words, he knew at once the criticisms were unfavourable. The following extract from the notice in the *Critic* will serve as a fair sample of the lot: for when they do agree upon the press, their unanimity is generally worse than wonderful—it is terrible.

"A new comedietta, by a Mr. Ernest Tempest, which succeeded Miss Brabant's magnificent impersonation of Rosalind in Shakespeare's charming pastoral, served to show that the appearance of a new author—which seems to be regarded by some people as the panacea for all dramatic ills—is not always an unmitigated blessing.

Mr. Tempest's comedietta is a crude production. There is some ingenuity in the general idea, and one or two of the situations are fairly amusing, but the dialogue is dull, disjointed, and aimless. What wit there is in it is forced and artificial. We would suggest to Mr. Tempest that a character ought not to be continually retorting on himself, first saying something, and then answering it. This is done continually. The actors did their best, but it is impossible for an actor to get out of a piece effects which are not in it. Mr. Tempest may consider himself indebted for the moderate success which his comedietta gained, to the unflagging efforts of that genuine comedian, Mr. Potter, who performed the part of an old man. It was almost painful to see this sound and sterling actor struggling to make some impression with the bald and incoherent dialogue allotted to him by the author. It is no fault of his that his success was only partial. Miss O'Neill, who made her first appearance on the London boards in the part of the heroine, is gifted with a pretty face and faultless figure, but we discern in her no evidence of dramatic capacity. Destitute of actresses of promise as the stage is, we are very much afraid that Miss O'Neill will not supply the want. The author would, perhaps, have been wise to have exercised that discretion which is the better part of valour, and not appeared before the curtain at the end. He was, however, greeted with applause, due, in great measure, to his being introduced before the foot-lights by the ever-charming Miss Brabant. A slight farce, from the practised pen of Mr. Tinker, opened the long programme, and was greeted by a crowded house with shouts of laughter and applause."

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And in the next day's paper was the following advertisement:—

"Notwithstanding the great success of Mr. Tempest's comedietta it must shortly be withdrawn, in consequence of previous arrangements."

And thus it came about that Ernest's piece, which had achieved a fair success, was only played a fortnight; whilst the farce by Mr. Tinker, which had not excited so much as a smile, which the critic had not even seen, and upon which the curtain fell in solemn silence, ran a hundred nights.

## CHAPTER X.

*A GOOD MAN'S SIN.*

"There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not."—*Ecclesiastes*.

IT was a dreary railway journey back to Cornfield. Every turn of the wheels was taking Mr. Bonamy further away from the lad who had deceived him, but the lad he loved for all that. Did the Leeds express ever before go so slowly? As the hedges, trees, and posts flew past him, and the telegraph wires came down, down, down, and then went up, up, up, and the wheels rattled, and the carriage rocked and swayed,

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poor Mr. Bonamy sat with a bowed head in a corner.

Oh, it was too bad of Harry. He knew that he was wild, he knew that he was reckless, he knew that he was extravagant, but he didn't think that he would have done this. Was this his Harry, who had been his pride and joy—his delight in the past and his hope for the future? Well, his mother was dead. There was some comfort in that. It was the first time in his life that Mr. Bonamy thanked God his wife had died. If she could see her Harry now, perhaps she could see some reason for it that he couldn't, some hope in it that he could not discern, some consolation that he could not find.

Should he tell Harry that he knew about it? Yes, he must. He could never look into that laughing face again, or take his

hand, with a secret like that between them. He would tell him he had been to London, and had come away again without so much as seeing him. He would not reproach him ; he had no desire to do that. It was not the thing itself which was his greatest grief, but the reflection that his Harry had been capable of doing it. He would write to him, and after that the matter should not be alluded to between them.

Ah, what selfish things we are, the best of us. Here was good, hearty, kindly Mr. Bonamy engrossed in grief about himself and Harry ; absorbed in sorrow at the thought of how his son had been deceiving him, and what a crack he had discovered in his character ; without a single thought of her who had been wronged the most, and who was mostly to be pitied. This human nature of ours is disgusting.

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The devil tempts us in strange ways, and he now tempted Mr. Bonamy. There is no man on earth who cannot be bought at a price. There are a few good men—not many—whose price is very high. But the devil has a long purse. He applies his most effectual temptation—that of “saving somebody from sin,” or what we are pleased to consider sin. There is no man so virtuous but this price will buy him, and if he succeeds he even will thank God that he has sold his soul. To use his favourite fallacy, “to do a great right” he will “do a little wrong.” As if the “little wrong” did not affect and poison the “great right,” and turn it into wickedness.

Good ends can never justify bad means, but bad means can and do invariably stultify good ends. Good men forget that their least wrongs are far more melancholy, far

less hopeful, and do far more harm than all the gross, outrageous crimes of bad men since the world began. When bad men sin, what wonder, why despair ? When good men sin, what help is there, what hope ?

Should Mr. Bonamy tell Mr. Grey? He ought to do : he knew he ought to do. But if he did then there would be an end to the engagement, and then Harry would be left without a refuge from his evil ways and might grow desperate and hardened. If he could get married —if he had a wife and home and children, he would have new interests and sympathies —the current of his life would be diverted into channels which were pure. He could not ruin his son's life for ever. He had not been a saint himself, and who was he to set himself upon the throne of heaven, and deal out God's damnation ? On his own

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son ! There was nothing of the Brutus about Mr. Bonamy. Still he felt deep down within him that he should be doing wrong. What of it ? He would do wrong. Might not a man commit a little wrong to save his son ? Could God be very angry with him for a little sin of love ? And if he was, he would bear even the Almighty's wrath for Harry's sake. Yes, he would sin. He would not say a word to Mr. Grey.

"Would you mind making up a fourth, sir?" asked a gentleman, who was preparing to play whist with his two friends.

Oh, what a world we live in ! Here was a man determining to brave the fire of hell, beside three others who were only thinking of a rubber.

How could he play whist ? He could not, and he told them so. But they looked so disconsolate, and prepared so ruefully to

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play with dummy that Mr. Bonamy's kind heart was smitten, and he said he'd try.

At first he could not tell the clubs from spades, and made some terrible mistakes, but by-and-by a rattling hand of trumps woke up the spirit of the whist-player within him, and he played away with positive delight. A man determining to brave the fire of hell delighted with a rattling hand of trumps ! Ah, how the gods must laugh at us and all our fears and sorrows !

If anybody had seen Mr. Bonamy as the train ran into Doncaster discussing the propriety of that last lead of trumps, and he had told them that he had a dreadful grief upon his mind, they would have thought he was a humbug. So much for appearances, which are the world's criterion ; and so much for the world's opinion of a man.

As soon as Mr. Bonamy got home he

went straight off to Mr. Grey's. He generally went in unannounced, but this time he electrified the servant by desiring her to put him in the drawing-room. She did so in mute wonder.

Mr. Grey had friends. He generally had. But Mr. Bonamy sent word he wished to see him by himself for a few minutes. Mr. Grey soon toddled up into the drawing-room.

"Why, Bonamy, what game's this?" But a glance at Mr. Bonamy assured him that there was a reason for this strange proceeding, which had best be volunteered, and so the question died away upon his lips.

"Grey," whimpered Mr. Bonamy, for he could not control himself, "Grey, we've been friends for thirty years."

"I hope we shall be for another thirty," added Mr. Grey, as much to give his old

friend time as anything, for Mr. Bonamy was very much affected.

“ You'd do as much for me, Grey, as for any man, I'm sure.”

“ I'd do more, Bonamy.”

“ I'm going to ask a great thing of you.”

“ I'll do it if I can, by jingo !”

“ I know you would, Grey ; but perhaps you can't. If you can't do it, and you say so, I shall know you would do if you could.”

“ What is it ?”

“ You remember our arrangement about Harry ?”

“ To be sure.”

“ He was to stop away for three months.”

Yes, he'd guessed that it was something about Harry — nothing else affected Mr. Bonamy like that.

“ I want you to consent to that arrangement being broken.”

“Do you want him back again, old man?”

“I want him married to your Edith.”

“So does she, and so do I,” continued Mr. Grey, after a pause, and still a thought of Ernest.

“But I mean at once.”

“At once?”

“Yes, right away off, and no questions asked.”

It was indeed a great thing Mr. Bonamy was asking. Mr. Grey had made his mind up to do anything that Mr. Bonamy was going to request of him, although it had involved his starting life afresh. But this was staggering indeed : to let his daughter marry Harry, and not ask a question.

“Mustn’t I ask why?”

“No, not a question.”

It was plain that something had gone

wrong with Harry; but what could it be ?  
It was indeed a staggerer.

“ Bonamy,” said Mr. Grey, at last, “ you wouldn’t ask me to do this if anything had happened to induce you to suppose he wouldn’t make Edith happy.”

It was an awkward observation, and made Mr. Bonamy appreciate the sin he was committing better than he had done even in the railway carriage, but it was not a question.

“ I believe,” said Mr. Bonamy, “ that he will make her a good honest husband, such as she deserves.” And so he did believe, but it was a deceit.

“ Well, Bonamy, I’d trust you more than any man I know ; but I am going to trust you now perhaps more than I have any right to trust a human being.”

Poor Mr. Bonamy was suffering some

sharp stabs of conscience now ; but he had made his mind up he would sin for Harry's sake ; and he was going through with it.

" You are going to trust me then ?"

There was a long pause. Mr. Grey was in a dreadful difficulty ; but he looked in Mr. Bonamy's appealing face, and thirty years of whiskey toddy came into his head ; and he put out his hand and said, " I am. I do."

" God bless you, Grey !" cried Mr. Bonamy, and gripped his hand. " You'll let me send for Harry, and the wedding shall come off at once ?"

" As soon as practicable."

" Grey," said Mr. Bonamy, and looked into his eyes—" I—I—God bless you, Grey. Good-night." And Mr. Bonamy ran clean out of the house, and blubbered like a schoolboy in the street.

When Mr. Grey went back into the parlour—which he did not do immediately—of course the ladies wanted to know all about it. But he was silent, almost stern ; and drank his toddy very quietly all the evening. And when the girls got up to say good-night and Edith had been kissed, her cheek felt rather damp. Perhaps it was the toddy.

Did Mr. Grey do right ? I think not. Ought he to have trusted in the friend of thirty years upon a matter which involved his daughter's life ? Was it a noble confidence or was it a weak yielding to affection ? Was it a grand faith or an abandonment of duty ? Who shall say ? The boundary between sublimest right and most tremendous wrong is sometimes but the thickness of a hair.

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When Mr. Bonamy got home he wrote the following note to Harry, and went out and posted it with his own hands.

“ MY DEAR HARRY,

“ Come home at once. I was in London yesterday and called upon you at your new address. I am not going to reproach you, but my heart is broken. I will give you one more chance. Come home at once. I have done more for you this night than I had any right to do for any man. Do this for me.

“ Your loving

“ FATHER.”

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE OLD STORY.

“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be.”  
*Ecclesiastes.*

ERNEST had now realised one of his ambitions : he had had a play performed, and he had found that there was very little in it.

It is one of the doleful features of life, that its negative side is so much more pronounced than its positive : that the things we have not, give us so much more distress and suffering than the things we have give satisfaction. Not a single hope, ambi-

tion or desire gives half the pleasure when attained that it gave pain before it was achieved.

Some people put this down to human discontent, which is never satisfied with what it has, but always longs for something which it has not. But the indisputable fact goes deeper down than any mortal weakness. It is a law of nature, which makes us long and fight for things, not so much for the pleasure they will give when we attain them as because we cannot live without them. And it seems to be another evidence that all that nature cares for is, to make men struggle on to serve her unknown purposes, and having done the work required of them, their happiness or wretchedness is quite a detail. Even love itself, which glitters in the distance like the crown of life—and is its crown—such crown as

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life possesses, is not the unmixed glory that it seems. It does not altogether change our dispositions, and make life a paradise ; but not to have it is to live in hell. Its absence is a torment : its presence is only peace.

Poor man without the objects of his vanity is like a fish which has been cast upon the land. It jumps and struggles in an agony ; and if it could would tear its gills clean off the hook to get back to the water. But if it gets there it experiences no ecstatic joy : it simply lives. And so our loves and our ambitions are the necessary conditions of our existence. There is no supreme bliss with them ; but there is no life without them.

Of course Ernest understood that his comedietta was a failure—not because it was unpleasing to the public, but because

the critics told the public not to come and see it. And of course he was dejected. But he felt it more on Rosamond's account than on his own. Her whole artistic life had been destroyed by just one line of Mr. Growler's.

It was not Mr. Growler's fault. He had to write on what he saw, and he had written honestly. He did not see in Rosamond any evidence of dramatic capacity ; and he had said so, that was all. But all the same, there was capacity in Rosamond —inherited capacity ; and had she been allowed to battle on, in time she would have made her way. But she was not allowed ; and that one line of Growler's ruined her whole life. I say again, it was no fault of Mr. Growler's : he had simply done his duty. But look here. It was the merest accident that he was there at all.

He had not meant to go till half an hour before he went ; and if he had not gone he would have sent his deputy—which deputy would have approved both play and actress, and completely altered the complexion of her future. Such a chance is life.

Ernest wondered what they thought about it at the club. He would go down and see. Did he really think that all the members of the *Owls* would have their heads full of his little piece ? I don't know. Anyhow, he wandered down, and walked into the club-room.

It was early in the afternoon, but the euchre players were at it already. There was the old gentleman with the white hair, smoking his short pipe, invoking the assistance of the shade of his Italian friend, and looking as beatific as ever. And there was the sweet poet in the speckled suit, cursing

and swearing, and holding up his trumps, as usual, until it was too late to profit by them.

“Euchre!” said a gentleman upon the other side, and scored up two. -

“Confound you, Hough,” exclaimed the white-haired gentleman—for even the beatitudes have their little tempers; “why the devil didn’t you play trumps?”

“Eh?” cried the poet, in the sweetest of soft voices, holding up his hands, and smiling with a broad complacency from ear to ear; “that’s just exactly what I should have done!” And then he pleasantly alluded to his partner’s eyes, and cheerfully consigned the souls of the assembled company to everlasting brimstone.

Ernest lit his pipe, and sat down by the euchre-players. Though he was intent upon the game, he suddenly became aware of

some mysterious exhilaration in the mental atmosphere. He looked up, and he saw that Mr. Liverpool had come into the room. The little gentleman came bustling up, and congratulated him on the success of his piece.

"Yes," answered Ernest, "it was quite successful with the house, although the company were not familiar with their parts—but it has got pitched into by the papers."

"Ah, that's the worst of it," said Mr. Liverpool. "The papers are so *blasés*. I saw the *Critic* had been giving you a wiggling, and I've just been telling Growler it was a great shame."

"And what did Growler say?"

"He said he thought he *had* made a mistake, but that of course he should stick to it."

"Oh, indeed."

"You see, he doesn't like new authors. He likes authors with whose style he is

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familiar, and then he can criticise their pieces without going to see them. But your turn will come. You mustn't be discouraged. He'll be kinder next time, though the piece is worse. Ta-ta." And Mr. Liverpool bustled off to some one else.

So Ernest next devoted his attention to the light young man, who had just brought a friend in, and had seated himself close beside him. Although the light young man had frequently seen Ernest at the club, he did not know his name. How many folks there are we know quite well, see constantly, and talk to regularly, without knowing what their names are ; without even thinking that they have a name !

By one of those "extraordinary" accidents which happen every day, their conversation turned on Ernest's piece ; and it transpired that the new-comer was a critic.

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I suppose in honour it was Ernest's duty either to declare himself or walk away; but in the little things of life there are temptations which it takes a hero to withstand; and heroism, which in big things is comparatively easy, is in little things beyond the power of man.

"I say," said the light young man, "what a slogging you gave that new piece at the Pantheon yesterday!"

"I should think so," said the critic.

"Who was it by?"

"Oh, some fellow of the name of Tempest, that nobody ever saw or heard of."

"Was it bad?"

"Oh, middling; but we can't have strangers coming poking their noses into the theatres, you know. Hang it, aren't there enough of us already?"

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“They’ve had a piece of mine at the Pantheon for six months.”

“Have they? Well, now, why the dickens couldn’t they have done your piece? I would have given you a rattling notice.”

“But how did this man Tempest get his piece in?”

“Well, between ourselves, I think he is some fellow of Brabant’s. She brought him on before the curtain at the end; and I am told she managed the whole business.”

“That accounts for it.”

“She’s made him pay for it, I’ll warrant,” said the critic.

“What sort of a girl was Miss O’Neill?”

“O’Neill—O’Neill?”

“The girl who made her first appearance. I’m told she’s rather pretty.”

“Oh, yes, a fine girl enough; but, bless you, no idea of acting.”

"Some one's put her on, I suppose."

"I suppose so. She's a great friend of Brabant's, I'm told ; and we all know what that means."

"A bad lot, eh ?"

"Oh, very bad, I understand."

"Humph ! It's a pity."

"A great pity." And the two smoked on complacently.

But Ernest could not stand this. He was very shy, particularly in the club, where even yet he didn't feel quite at home : but he must speak now, and speak he did.

"Excuse me interrupting you two gentlemen," he said ; "but I couldn't help hearing your remarks on Miss O'Neill ; and as that lady is a friend of mine, I beg to give an unqualified contradiction to the imputations which have been cast upon her."

"Not by me," replied the critic, un-

abashed. "I only say what I've been told."

"It would be just as well if you would not," exclaimed the barrister, whose blood was up.

"Do you mean to say it isn't true?" inquired the critic with a smile.

"I mean to say it is an utter lie, without a tittle of truth in it."

"Do you?" said the critic, who seemed very certain of his ground.

"I'm sorry if we've given you offence," observed the light young man, who wanted to make matters up.

"It wasn't you. It was your friend."

"Mr. Matthews, of the *Daily Albion*," returned the light young man. "Whom have I the pleasure of introducing?"

"My name is Tempest," replied Ernest; and got up and walked out of the club.

"Whew!" whistled the young man.  
"We've put our feet in it."

But the critic burst out laughing.  
"He was thoroughly in earnest."  
"Oh, yes," laughed the critic. "Poor devil! he believes it."

Ernest had certainly behaved in a rather ridiculous way. But it is not agreeable to hear the woman you're in love with spoken of in that style, especially by a man who has just given you a "slogging." He felt that he had acted rather foolishly, when he was out in the cool air; but what was he to do? He couldn't go back and say so. But he felt it.

He was to feel it more yet. It is very mournful, but it may be laid down as a general rule, that it is a mistake to work oneself up into a state of indignation in defence of anybody. When we are reflecting

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upon people we are pretty certain to be right upon the whole, however wrong we are in the particulars. But it is always dangerous to stand up for anybody—though it is a popular thing to do, and is certain of a round of applause—for we are almost always certain to be wrong.

It suddenly struck Ernest he would call on Rosamond. He hadn't seen her since the night of the production of his piece, and didn't know what effect the criticisms might have had upon her. He didn't even yet know her address, but they would know it at the theatre. So he went there to inquire, and having got it from the stage-door, went in search of her.

He was surprised to find what comfortable lodgings she was in. He knew she was receiving a much better salary than she had got at Cornfield, but still

he shouldn't have thought that she could have afforded to take lodgings in a house of such pretensions as the one at which he was now knocking.

"Is Miss O'Neill in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Disengaged?"

"Yes."

He was shown into a downstairs room, and presently requested to go up to the first floor.

He found Rosamond alone, sitting on a sofa amidst a litter of newspapers, with an open letter lying in her lap. There were traces of tears upon her face, and she did not rise when he went in, but listlessly held out her hand.

He almost started when he saw her. She looked so like Mrs. Vane. The roundness had all gone out of her face. The smile had as it were been ironed out

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of it. There was the same fixed look about the eyes. It was the dead alive again.

But oh, how she was painted!

"Why, Rosamond," said Ernest, "you are positively sitting on the criticisms."

She smiled a rueful smile. It was the criticisms which had sat on Rosamond.

"They are too cruel," she replied.

"Yes, they are rather nasty, but we'll hope for better luck next time."

"It's too late now."

"Oh, nonsense. The house liked you well enough."

"Yes; I've no fault to find with that, or with the critics either. I suppose it's all true that they say. I have mistaken my vocation. I have no dramatic instincts. I have nothing but a pretty face."

"No, it's not true. It's all nonsense. You were nervous, that was all."

"It doesn't matter whether it's true or not. It's done for me." And she showed Ernest the letter which was lying in her lap. It had just come, and it was from the manager.

"DEAR MADAM,—This is to inform you that on the withdrawal of Mr. Tempest's piece—which will be in about a fortnight—I shall have no further occasion for your services. I'm very sorry, but the criticisms are unanimously adverse.

"In haste, yours, &c."

"I knew it was coming," sighed the girl. "Miss Brabant had told me so. She did her best to get me a small part in one of her own pieces. But the manager said no, he couldn't fight the press."

"He is a beast," said Ernest, most unjustly.

"That's what Miss Brabant said. But she said all men were beasts."

"Not all."

"I know they're not—not all."

Then there came one of Ernest's pauses. He didn't know what to say. But Rosamond assisted him.

"Oh, Ernest," she said, "what am I to do? It is my living."

"You must try some other manager."

"It's not a bit of use. They all say in the face of all these criticisms it is useless. I shall starve."

That "tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune" occasionally, had now come to Ernest. His heart leapt and fell within him, but he forced himself to calmness, and said very quietly—

"You shall never starve till I do, Rosa-

mond. I have no business, but I have some means. I could not give you a luxurious home ; but I could make you comfortable, and would do my best to make you happy. Will you share your lot with mine—and you shall own half what I have, and all my heart ?”

The girl rose up, and even through the paint her face grew white.

“ You don’t mean that you love me, Ernest ?”

“ Don’t let us play with one another, Rosamond. You must have known I loved you long ago.”

“ Of course I knew you cared for me ; but no, I never knew you loved me—really loved me. No, you don’t !” The girl seemed almost frightened.

“ I do love you, Rosamond, and ask you now if you will be my wife.”

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She placed her hand upon the table for support, and stood regarding him.

“ Ernest,” she said, at length, “ you have well earned my confidence, and I will give it you. But promise me that after having heard what I am going to say, you will not speak one word but go.”

“ I cannot promise that, when all my happiness depends upon the issue of our conversation.”

“ Then, Ernest, you must go now.”

This was checkmate ; so he promised.

“ I cannot marry you,” said Rosamond. “ You have been a true, kind friend to me and mine, and I respect you, and admire you, and am fond of you ; but Ernest, I don’t love you. Nay, I love another.”

He was quite prepared. He even had expected it. But he could not repress a jealous pang, when—just as she was saying

that she loved another—his eye fell, for the first time, upon a man's hat, which was standing upside down upon the sideboard ; and on the lining of it he saw these initials —“ H. B.”

But Rosamond had not done yet. Her frame was writhing, and her face was working. She had evidently something more to say. He waited patiently, and she resumed—

“ It is not right that I should keep the secret from you. I had better tell you all, and it may help you to forget me. You have heard my mother's story, Ernest ?”

“ Part of it.”

“ At least, you know that she was never married to my father, and that Agnes and myself were—illegitimate.”

“ That's why you went away.”

“ That's why I have done many things.

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What does it matter what I do? I've nearly finished. You will keep your promise?"

"I have said so."

"Ernest, what my mother was I am. Now go."

He went. He dragged himself along the streets, and to the Temple. It was as much as he could do to clamber up the stairs; but he got up at last and shut the door. He pulled his chair on to the hearth-rug, and sitting down in it, stared blankly at the fire.

Rosamond had told him a good deal, but she had not told him all. She had not told him that she had received a letter from the man whom she did love, to say that they must never meet again, and that she was about the most forlorn of all God's creatures.

Oh, pious grandfather! if from thy throne in heaven amongst the angels thou canst

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see thy handiwork under the sun, and watch its consequences broadening out amongst the sons of men, a comfortable heaven must be thine ! Don't think thy work is done. It will go on and on for ever. Thy bones are rotting in the churchyard clay ; thy deeds are living an immortal life. The seed which thou hast sown increases thousand-fold, and will be harvested by all posterity.

END OF BOOK THE THIRD.



## **BOOK THE FOURTH.**

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## CHAPTER I.

*DESPAIR.*

"Man cannot utter it."—*Ecclesiastes.*

THE sun is shining on the river, and the river is streaming on. A week has passed, and Ernest is beginning to recover from the shock of Rosamond's confession. Its first effect upon him was to paralyze him. He could not grasp it. It conveyed no definite idea to his mind, but simply seemed to numb his faculties. Then, by degrees, his brain began to work, and to take in the horrible idea, and horrible it was to Ernest.

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By slow degrees he seemed to have got used to it, and to have thought it out in all its shapes and hideous suggestions and associations ; but every now and then, at oddest moments, with a startling suddenness, and *a-propos* of nothing, the horror of it would rush back into his brain quite fresh and new, and seem almost to rend him : so powerful is old association and the world's opinion.

With Ernest's moral views—which still remained unchanged, although they had been rudely shaken—it made him feel for Rosamond contempt, and earth contains no greater torment than contempt for somebody we love. “It may help you to forget me,” Rosamond had said. It is what women always say. Some women, even, will deliberately seek it, that they may lessen, as they think, the sorrow of a part-

ing ; but alas, it is equivalent to pouring poison in the wound. What woe is like it ? And it helps nothing. It helps no one to forget, but turns remembrance into frenzy and despair. For it does not kill love. Some people say all true love must be founded on respect, and hold what they are pleased to consider their affections under such control, that they are able to divert them in a moment if the object of them loses their respect. But notwithstanding these philosophers, there are no two things which have less to do with one another than love and respect. And it is very well for the young ladies that it is so. Ay, very well for everybody, for it is a question whether, in the deepest sense of the word, there is under the sun a being who is worthy of respect.

No, it does not kill love, but it makes

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love a torture. To despise a woman and yet love her, is to have a vulture plucking at one's heart for ever. It is bad enough to feel no great respect for her, but to despise her means to have no peace by night or day ; no comfort in the past, no prospect in the future. It not only takes away the happiness which was to come, but it destroys the happiness which has already been, and turns remembrance into dread. Yet the love abides, and cannot be burst through, but binds you to the object of your horror, like a chain which binds you to a corpse. You cannot eat or drink, but you can taste it ; you cannot sleep or wake, but you can smell it ; you cannot go into the street, but you must drag your corpse along with you.

But why did Ernest despise Rosamond ? If we analyze them, we shall find that

most of our despairs, and hatreds, and contempts, and even griefs, are in some measure figments of the brain. There is a strong dramatic instinct in humanity ; and even in our most profound and genuine emotions we are apt to act a little, and to place ourselves before our own minds in exaggerated and theatrical positions. When an emotion—even agony—has reached a certain pitch, we cherish it, resent the very notion of there being any possible mistake, and scout the impious suggestion that the truth is not so bad as we are making it. Our feelings generally have some grounds in facts, but the ecstasies and paroxysms into which we are so apt to work them, are as a rule mere froth upon the top of them.

But further. There is under the sun a vast amount of very great and genuine

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grief, which is not in the least imagined, but which all the time there is no real occasion for. Such grief was Ernest's now. He felt contempt for Rosamond; and it was genuine contempt, and genuine sorrow was its consequence; but Rosamond was not deserving of contempt. He thought that she was odious and impure, but she was lovable and chaste. She loved the man who was unworthy of her love and did not love her in return, devotedly, and with a love as holy and as pure as that of any wife for any husband, and a thousand times more holy than the love of the majority of wives. He thought she was unchaste, whilst all the time she was as chaste -- and twice as virtuous -- as any virgin of old Rome who spent her life beside the vestal fire and broke the laws of God.

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He did not come to see this all at once, but by degrees his brain brought consolation to him: for he had brains, and brains are now and then a comfort, though they are oftener a torment. And in his week of agony he grew a century in wisdom; ay, how many centuries? for how many hundred years will it take men to learn what Ernest learnt in that one week of suffering?

He thought of Miss Brabant. He felt that he was drawn to Miss Brabant more strongly than to far less sinful women; and he knew, deep down within his heart, that she was really a better human being than a hundred virtuous people he could think of. And in the middle of one silent night, when old St. Clement's had just finished chiming "oranges and lemons," and struck two, and he was lying still in bed, the truth came

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stealing in his mind that chastity, all pure and precious as it is, is not a woman's crown. It is a lustrous gem to glitter on her breast, but it is not her crown. Her crown is charity.

Don't let us shrink from this old truth, which lies entombed beneath the ignorance of ages—which only Christ has ever disinterred—which Christians have smothered up again. Though it confound our education, though it alter our opinions, though it stultify our literature and render half our poetry a folly, still “it is good that we should take hold of this.” There is nothing dreadful in it. On the contrary, it is a happy truth, full of hope and consolation.

And then he thought of Mrs. Vane and Rosamond. He knew them both to be good women. One of them had stood to

him as the very model of truth, steadfastness, and kindness. And as he thought of what they really were, and what the world would call them, and then thought of all the brazen women who have sold themselves for rank, and diamonds, and establishments, and who are living out their shame beneath the world's smile and the church's blessing, there came into his mind a new idea of purity, and some conception of a moral code which is less vulgar than the world's.

And if the wreck and ruin of those moral creeds which he had held so firmly caused him consternation at the first, he was rewarded afterwards by the bright light which he could now see shining upon many of the problems which had hitherto perplexed him, revealing many things he had not seen before, explaining many things

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the world gives up as mysteries, and satisfying him that though they may be difficulties yet for many generations, they will not be difficulties till the end of time. And it was with a huge relief he felt himself emancipated from contempt for many a man whom he admired and liked, but had not hitherto been able to respect.

The doubt, and fear, and frenzy, and despair of ruined happiness and shattered creeds are not lost when they lead a man to truth, although it be such truth as places him beyond men's sympathies, and leaves him friendless in a world of fools.

With his new ideas, all his sympathies returned to Rosamond. His love had never left her. He had not been again to see her because he thought she did not want him, and he had not had the heart to go. He would have been to see her long

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ago if he had known how desperate was her position.

He could talk about her now; and though he did not feel himself at liberty to disclose the confidence she had reposed in him, he told the surgeon—when at last he called: his visits were not half so frequent now as in the olden time—enough to make him feel uneasy. George's heart smote him that he had neglected her; and it was time it did.

Oh, business, business—which is but the means of living—how it absorbs and swallows up the very life itself! How many friends seem cold, neglectful, and unkind, when they are simply busy! And it comes upon a man so suddenly, and swamps him so effectually; and it must be done.

“We must do something for her,” said the surgeon.

"Have you time to come and see her now?" asked Ernest.

"No, I haven't," replied George, with the eternal watch in hand, as if he was just feeling Ernest's pulse. "But I must make it."

"Come along then."

And they took a cab and drove to Rosamond's address. The servant did not keep them waiting longer than a servant usually does; and Ernest was the spokesman.

"Is Miss O'Neill in, please?"

"Oh, no, sir! She left here a fortnight since," replied the servant. An uneasy feeling fell upon them both.

"Would you oblige me with her new address?"

"I don't know what it is, sir." He had felt it coming.

“But where are you to send her letters?”

“She left no directions, sir.”

“And no address?” The servant shook her head.

“But isn’t she coming back again?”

“She’s left here altogether.”

The two stared blankly in each other’s faces, as the truth dawned on them, for the second time, that Rosamond had fled.

## CHAPTER II.

## FORGIVENESS.

“There is no remembrance of former things.”

*Ecclesiastes.*

A STORY-TELLER has this difficulty to contend with. If he pictures ordinary people as they really are, and puts down faithfully exactly what they do, he alienates the reader's sympathy, and is accused of drawing monsters. The people whom one meets with every day, with whom one dines, and smokes, and talks, and amongst whom one lives, do things so mean occasionally, and are animated by such sordid motives, that

when faithfully described we shrink from them, and say, "What wretches all the people in this book are!" And occasionally men are animated by such high and generous impulses, that, when they are set down in print, the reader cries, "This man is drawing paragons, not human beings!" The world, which is more cynical than Swift, or Rochefoucault, or any other author it denounces, systematically declines to believe in noble motives. You will never persuade the world that an action which has the appearance of being base, was really done with a good motive; and it must be mournfully confessed the world shows its common sense in its scepticism, although of course it is sometimes mistaken. But on the other hand, the world refuses to believe that average men and women do mean things; and when they are described

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looks coldly on the character who does them.

It is impossible to write down men and women as they really are. No story-teller yet has had the hardihood to do it. Perhaps the one who has come nearest to the truth is jolly, genial old Thackeray, whom the perversity of fools has dubbed a cynic. But that valiant pen was governed by a wise old head, which did not let it dip too deep into the frailty of humanity ; and no one else has dared to go so far. The essayist, the epigrammatist, the moralist, and the philosopher can do it, but not the story-teller who desires his characters to keep the reader's sympathy.

I hope that nothing Harry Bonamy has done has led my reader to suppose that he was wanting in good feeling. No human being ever had a better heart than Harry

Bonamy ; and he will grow up into just as generous and jolly an old fellow as his father. But some of the wickedest things in life are done by generous, good-hearted people.

It must not be supposed that he deserted Rosamond unfeelingly. But he had never really loved her. It was she who had loved him. And when he went away to London he was wishful, for her own sake, that their parting should be final. But when a woman loves a man he has no chance with her. She flings herself into his arms, and will be taken. A woman can resist a man ; but no man can resist a woman. Such a man as Ernest might have made a struggle for it, though he would inevitably have been conquered in the end ; but such a man as Harry could not even make a show. It was not his fault he had met her at the

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station. He had gone away, intending to have nothing more to do with her—not from satiety or heartlessness, but for the girl's own sake. But his kind heart was smitten by the pain which his determination gave her, and he met her at the station, and the thing went on.

But now he was between two women. He must abandon one; and it was Edith he preferred. Nay, even if it had been Rosamond he wanted, he was not the sort of man who has the strength and nerve to break his father's heart and do the right. That letter which he got from Mr. Bonamy, took Harry flying past those posts and wires which Mr. Bonamy had passed the day before; and it was from Cornfield he wrote to Rosamond. He wrote the kindest letter he knew how, and made such slight provision for her as his means allowed.

Of course he knew his father had discovered all ; but not a word was said between them on the subject. And from that day to this—it makes me burn with shame for poor humanity, to write the words—the fate of that unhappy girl has never troubled good, kind-hearted Mr. Bonamy.

Women, with all their grace, their goodness, and their genius, are only nature's "seconds" after all. Physically, mentally, and morally, they are inferior to men. Their bodies are less strong, their minds are narrower, their souls are smaller. The only use of women in the world is as they are subservient to men. And no one feels this truth so thoroughly as women do themselves ; and they are never really happy if they are not in subordinate positions. But for this radical inferiority—which is their terrible misfortune, not their fault—

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their sex has dearly paid. They have been weaker, and we have oppressed them ; they have been within our power, and we have cruelly abused it ; they have been at our mercy, and we have had no pity. It is no use saying, God help them ! for God will not help them.

Mr. Bonamy received his son with open arms. The old man's transient anger--for it is no use my pretending he was greatly shocked--was wholly conquered by the prompt submission of the son he loved. The moment Harry saw him he knew he was forgiven. The past was blotted out, and there was no remembrance of it.

It was just the same with Mr. Grey. He had given Bonamy his word, and he would keep it royally. Of course he knew that Harry had done something wrong ; but he thrust down the knowledge, and the vague

misgivings which the knowledge brought ; and not a trace of consciousness was visible upon his beaming face when he held out his hand to Harry as his son. Of course the ladies were in ecstasies of joy. The toddy was abandoned for the choicest of champagne—not because they liked it better, but because it cost more. The prodigal had returned and the fatted calf was killed.

Thus Harry was received in honour and in glory—more as if he had distinguished than disgraced himself : and Rosamond was homeless. There was one reason for this difference—and only one. Harry was a man. Rosamond was a woman.

Even Mrs. Grey made an effort, and recovered from a very bad attack of “ nerves,” which she professed to have been suffering from all day, and actually left the sofa and

sat up. And the grey eyes of Edith lighted up the room.

"How dare you come back," she demanded of the prodigal, "before I sent for you? I thought I was well rid of you."

"I couldn't live without you, you see," answered Harry.

How he could say it I don't know: no more did Mr. Bonamy: but he did say it, and he was believed. Did anybody ever disbelieve a lie? We disbelieve truth every day, but there is something about lies which always takes us in.

"Well, I suppose the next thing to be done's to fix the day," said Mr. Grey, who, having said he'd do it, thought he'd do it well.

An exclamation of dismay broke forth from all the ladies. Why ladies are so scandalized at anybody speaking of "the

day," which they have been thinking about since they were in the nursery, is one of the great mysteries of life.

"The sooner the better," exclaimed Mr. Bonamy, who, if he'd had his way, would have had them married by a special license the next morning.

"What do you say to the first day in March?" suggested Mr. Grey.

But this being the suggestion of a man, of course it couldn't be thought of by the women. The first of March, indeed! how could papa be so ridiculous? What reason was there why they should be married on the first of March? and there was so much reason why they shouldn't. Now, if he'd said the second, or the twenty-eighth of February, there might have been some sense in it; but the first of March! it was ridiculous!

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"Well, say the twenty-eighth of February, then," said Mr. Grey, who was determined to be amiable.

But the man having selected the twenty-eighth of February, the ladies thought the second of March would be for many reasons preferable. The reasons were mysterious, and were discussed in whispers, with a little giggling.

"Well, say the second of March, then," said Mr. Grey.

What a nasty man he was, to be so stupidly accommodating! No, on second thoughts, and after more mysterious whispering, the ladies thought the twenty-eighth of February would be better. And so it was arranged.

"I say, girls, won't we have a jolly wedding?" said the jolly father.

"Oh, you dear papa!" Embraces fol-

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lowed. General osculation, in which Harry joined.

"We'll have Ernest down from London."

Humph! this prospect did not seem to add much to the general hilarity : but Mr. Grey was always thinking about Ernest, and would never let him be forgotten.

"We'll ask all Cornfield," continued hospitable Mr. Grey. And then remembering the bibulous capacity of all Cornfield, he added seriously, "By gad, I must lay in some more champagne!"

"I'll stand the champagne," shouted Harry's father.

"Nothing of the sort," said Mr. Grey.

"Well, then, I'll drink it," cried submissive Mr. Bonamy.

"James," interrupted Mrs. Grey, who hadn't thrown a damper over the proceedings for some time, "I wish you wouldn't

make such very definite arrangements till the time comes. You've no idea how nervous it makes me to hear you talk in that way. Suppose you were to die before the day."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed the girls.

"Well, my dears, you know papa's heart is not what it might be; and it's really tempting Providence to make such very definite arrangements."

This was not a cheerful turn to give the conversation, but Mr. Grey was not to be put down.

"Well," he continued, "if I were to die the wedding should come off the same."

"Papa dear," exclaimed Edith, "you know very well it wouldn't."

"You are going to be married on the twenty-eighth of February," persisted Mr. Grey, who could be dogmatic enough when

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he chose. "That's all settled. And whether I'm alive or dead, upon that day I wish you to be married."

"Oh, papa!" protested the young ladies.

"Why not?" Mr. Grey continued. "You are only just beginning your life. I am nearly ending mine. Your life will go on for long years when I am gone. Your marriage is of more importance than my death."

"Don't speak of it, papa."

"I wish you to be married on the twenty-eighth of February, whether I am here or not. Bonamy, you'll see to that."

He certainly was nobly carrying out his promise, and the tears came nearly into the eyes of Mr. Bonamy as he replied—

"Yes, yes, Grey; but don't talk in that way."

Mrs. Grey, who had first introduced the

subject, at this point inquired what they were all talking in that melancholy tone for? She really wished they wouldn't: it made her feel quite ill.

All this time Harry sat very quiet—strangely so for him; but buoyant and light-hearted as he was, he could not banish from his mind the spectre of a poor girl sitting in a lonely room two hundred miles away, with a fixed stony gaze, and with an open letter lying in her lap.

Men don't leave women desolate without a throb of sympathy or pang of pain. If Harry had deserted Edith he would have sat by Rosamond and thought of her, as he now sat by her and thought of Rosamond. If Rosamond had any friends, they would have said he was a wretch to leave her. If he had abandoned Edith, Edith's friends would have said just the same: and both

would have been wrong. He was between two women ; what was he to do ?

He ought not to have got into the difficulty, say the moralists. But they forget that it was only kindness got him into it ; and being in it, their pronouncement sheds no light upon the question how he ought to have got out of it. He did quite right in leaving Rosamond. Her pitiful condition is no argument. There is no argument in pity, and it is a dangerous guide ; for it was pity got him into the dilemma. It would have been mistaken kindness to have stayed with her, and he had seen the consequences of mistaken kindness are disaster. Few people stay to think that many of men's acts which seem most base, originate far oftener in kindness than in villainy. Blank, unadulterated villainy is very rare. Men are not monsters, and

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mistaken kindness causes far more misery than all the wickedness in all the world.

No, Harry could do nothing better than he had done in forsaking her, and making for her what provision he was able. But it was a wretched business ; and the sweat stood often on his forehead, and the blood ran cold within his veins.

Think you when Harry looked in those grey eyes of Edith's he did not see reflected in them the brown eyes of Rosamond ? Think you that when he heard that Edith's merry laugh he did not hear that Rosamond's deep groan ? Think you that when he watched the one's delight he did not feel the other one's despair ? Then shame on your uncharity. For Harry, who was generous right through, would willingly have laid down life for either.

Oh, what a world this is, which makes



us plunge in woe the very beings we would live or die for : and the sun still shines upon the river, and the river streams along !

It must not be supposed that Harry went through any train of reasoning on the subject. It is one of the absurdities of human criticisms that they judge men's conduct upon abstract principles. If a certain act commends itself to their judgment (or more frequently their prejudice) they praise it ; and if not, condemn. But actions—whether good or bad—are hardly ever done from abstract motives. Nearly all important actions in a man's life are committed in a tempest of excitement and a whirlwind of confusion. And it is oftener trifles that determine acts than virtue, vice, or judgment. The mere accident whether or not at a particular moment a man has any money in his pocket may prevent or prompt

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an act on which depends that man's whole future life. Then what a farce—nay, sometimes what a tragedy it is—to judge a man by any single act.

It took the conversation some short time to rally from the gloom in which it had been plunged by Mrs. Grey. But Mr. Bonamy produced a few of his selectest, oldest jokes, and in the end created a diversion. What effect those old jokes have ! I wonder how it is that the most brilliant sally which was never said before, produces not a tithe of the effect of those old jests which we have heard a hundred times.

Again the conversation flourished, the champagne popped and creamed, and the piano rattled merrily. The girls played and sang, and Mrs. Grey subsided on the sofa. Harry managed to appear in something like his usual spirits, and Mr. Grey

and Mr. Bonamy were drinking quite as much as was judicious.

Reader, have you ever noticed how when we are very, very jolly something always comes to make us very, very miserable ? It makes one frightened of being happy.

The talk was at its briskest, and the laughter at its loudest, when there came a little ring at the front door. It was a very little tinkle, and it was not noticed in the revelry. As for Mr. Grey, he didn't even hear it. But it was his knell.

There came a tap against the parlour door.

"Come in," cried Mr. Grey.

The servant brought a card in on a tray. It was an ordinary, innocent little bit of pasteboard, and even at that time of night was not alarming ; for the Greys were used to visitors at all hours.

Mr. Grey put up his eye-glasses to read the name.

"Some stranger," he said. "Put him in the drawing-room."

The servant shut the door.

"Who ever is it at this time of night?" asked Mrs. Grey.

"That's more than I can tell you. I don't know the man from Adam. I suppose it's business."

"You won't be long, papa?" exclaimed the girls, as Mr. Grey got up.

"No, I expect not," he replied; "but Bonamy will keep you all alive. You'll stop here till I come back, Bonamy?"

"Stop here!" cried Mr. Bonamy, behind a bottle of champagne. "I'm going to live and die here."

"That's all right." And Mr. Grey went toddling up the stairs.

As soon as he was gone, the ladies, with a pardonable curiosity, began to scrutinise the card, which he had left upon the table. But it did not throw much light upon the business of the visitor. It only had two words engraved upon it—

“Mr. Furnival.”

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## CHAPTER III.

### AT LAST.

“It falleth suddenly upon them.”—*Ecclesiastes.*

THE old lawyer was sitting shivering in a corner of the drawing-room. Why he should have gone into a corner, and not sat before the fire, I don’t know. It was characteristic of him that he had.

“ You look cold,” Mr. Grey said, after he had greeted him.

“ I am cold,” said the lawyer. Mr. Grey began to stir the fire. “ I have had a long journey.”

“Indeed.”

“I have come from London.”

“Not on my account, I hope.”

“On your account, sir.” And to Mr. Grey’s account he charged it.

“You could do with some refreshment, I shouldn’t wonder.” For Mr. Grey’s first thoughts were always of the creature comforts of his guests.

“I certainly should thank you for a glass of wine.”

The bell was rung, and wine and sandwiches were ordered. An unusually light refraction for the Greys, but there was something about Mr. Furnival which Mr. Grey didn’t like, and he didn’t care to make the man too comfortable.

“My name is Furnival.”

“So your card informed me.”

“I am a solicitor of Gray’s Inn, and have

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come to see you upon most important business—business which will necessitate my entering at some short length into your private history.”

The brow of Mr. Grey grew black as night.

“And at the outset I may say that seeing you at all is in some sense a breach of confidence.”

“Why did you come then?”

“I was advised by counsel of great eminence that it was what I ought to do.”

Mr. Furnival was an attorney of the old school, who was first an attorney and then a man, and had a superstitious but becoming reverence for members of the bar. He would have broken all the ten commandments, *seriatim*, had he been advised by counsel of great eminence it was a proper thing to do.

"I was solicitor to the late Mr. Peter Grey, your father ; and I think I may allow myself to add, his intimate and confidential friend."

He paused, but Mr. Grey said not a word; but sat still, breathing rather hardly. He felt that it was coming now. He knew not what, but "it"—that something he had been expecting all his life.

"It was agreed between us that I never should present myself before you or communicate with you in reference to the matter upon which I am about to speak ; but circumstances have occurred to make it necessary that I should. In all I am about to say, I am fortified by the opinion of counsel of the greatest eminence."

"Well," was the single word which dropped from Mr. Grey's lips, like the tolling of a bell.

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“ You will remember that in very early years, before you met the lady who is now your wife, you were entangled in a most unfortunate connection with an actress of the name of Douglas.”

“ I was not entangled.”

“ Well, we'll say involved.”

“ Go on.”

“ Your father, who was one of the most honourable men I ever knew, did not approve of that connection.”

“ He would not let us marry.”

“ Having set his heart upon your marrying your present wife.”

“ Well.”

“ Miss Douglas separated from you.”

“ We were forced to separate.”

“ At any rate, the intimacy was determined on your undertaking not to see her or communicate with her.”

A cold sweat stood on Mr. Grey's brow, and his face grew ashy white, as he remembered that unholy promise.

"Upon which undertaking your late father made a very generous provision for Miss Douglas."

"He provided a subsistence for her and his grandchild."

"A settlement was made upon them, of which I was the trustee."

"It was through you that they received the money?"

"Through your humble servant."

Mr. Grey began to look with some degree of interest on the man who had been last connected with the woman he had worshipped.

"Miss Douglas left the stage and took the name of Vane."

"The name of what?"

“Of Vane.”

“Vane?”—where was it that Mr. Grey had heard that name? It seemed familiar to him.

The lawyer was now coming to the awkward point, and there not being any counsel of great eminence at hand to fortify him, fortified himself with half a glass of sherry.

“Some months afterwards, she had a second daughter.”

“What?” shrieked Mr. Grey.

“She had a second daughter.”

He grasped the arms of the arm-chair in which he sat, and for some seconds could not speak again. At last he thundered, “Why was I not told?”

“Your father thought that it was better you should not be told.”

“Thought! thought! what right had he to think?”

"Humph," coughed the lawyer; and finished off the glass.

"How dare he?"

"Your father was a very conscientious man, and I am sure he did what he conceived was right. However, to proceed"—

The lawyer took another glass of sherry. It was really very awkward. The thing seemed quite right and proper, and a most religious thing to do, when it was done; but even Mr. Furnival was conscious that it didn't sound so noble when it came to be repeated. However, he plucked up his courage and continued.

"In the course of nature, Mrs. Vane died."

"Helen Douglas died within twelve months of my deserting her," said Mr. Grey; who saw his conduct in its true light now, and gave it its right name.

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"Humph," coughed the lawyer again.

"No. There you are mistaken."

"I was told so by my father."

"Your father was a most religious man, and I've no doubt he told you so with the best motives in the world."

"Do you mean to say it was a lie?"

"I don't like using such strong language, Mr. Grey. I should prefer to say that it was not the fact."

"What! do you mean to tell me that she didn't die?"

"She died about a year ago."

"A year ago!"

"Perhaps fifteen months."

The room was swimming round; the lights were dancing up and down; and for the first time Mr. Grey began to think the doctor had been right, and something *was* the matter with his heart.

“The children!” he gasped out at length.

“The elder died about three months before the mother.”

“Is that a lie?”

“A lie!”

“Well, is it not the fact?”

“You may rely upon its being the truth. In fact, it is the death of both the mother and the child which brings me here. The trust has now determined, and I am advised that I must pay the trust fund over to yourself.”

“But is my second daughter dead?”

“No. She is alive, or was some months ago.”

“Then what is she to live upon?”

“She is not contemplated in the settlement. I had no right to pay the proceeds into her hands.”

“But you have done?”

“Not a penny.”

“Good God! have you left the girl to starve? My daughter?”

“I acted under the advice of counsel of the greatest eminence.”

“Where is she?” Mr. Grey was in a white heat now, and fiercely poked the fire.

“That I can’t tell you,” said the lawyer.

“But you must!”

“But I don’t know.”

“You don’t know!”

“My dear sir, I haven’t an idea.”

“Do you mean to say you’ve left that girl without a penny, and don’t even know her whereabouts?”

“She ran away.”

“And you didn’t follow her?”

“It was no part of my duty——”

“You made no inquiries?”

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"The trust deed contemplated no inquiries."

"Man!" screamed Mr. Grey, who was now standing up, and had the poker in his hand, "it's well for you that you are in my house, or by the Lord I'd kill you!"

"I'll call again when you are calmer," said the lawyer, who was fairly frightened.

"I think you'd better," Mr. Grey said, and relapsed into his chair.

"Good evening, Mr. Grey."

But Mr. Grey was too much occupied with his black thoughts to give the lawyer good night, and so that gentleman was fain to go downstairs alone, and let himself out quietly; and very much relieved he felt when he was safe in his hotel.

"Vane? Vane?" Where was it Mr. Grey had heard that name? He could not think. He could do nothing but sit still

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and stare, and he sat still and stared for half-an-hour. The black fit was upon him with a vengeance now.

To think the woman whom he loved—for he did not love Mrs. Grey : it is no use pretending that he did—had been alive and living lonely all these years, when he had thought that she was dead, and comforted his heart by thinking that her loneliness was over and her trouble buried in the kindly clay ! To think that they who loved each other more than anything on earth had both been living under the same sun for twenty years, and neither of them known the other was alive ! To think that he had had two daughters all these years, and never known it—daughters whom he would have loved, ay, even more, if that were possible, than those whom he had known ! To think that one of them

was living now—was filling even now some little spot in space—he knew not where ! In danger, might be—in distress—in poverty ! For aught he knew she might be at that moment starving. His daughter starving !

And as he thought of all these things, the wickedness of that mad promise he had made to spare his father's heart rose up before his mind in all its hideous guilt. How many lives had been a sacrifice to save that one poor heart a little pain, which had for more than twenty years been rotten in the grave ? He cursed his father and he cursed himself.

And then he thought of all the dangers which beset a friendless girl cast loose upon the surface of the earth—a beauty, too ; he knew she was a beauty, and that she was like her mother. Oh, what could he do to

save her? Oh, what could he do to find her?

And all the time the knowledge where she was, was in the breast of one who was beneath the very roof to which he raised his eyes in anguish. Shall we ever know the things that we have missed in this world? We pass our heart's desires, our wildest longings, our most passionate ambitions, in the street, and know them not.

Was there no help? Could God be so unfeeling? Would not the heavens open, and a voice descend, and tell him where he was to find his child? Would God not send an angel down to lead him to her? No, there was no help. The heavens did not open, nor the voice descend. No angel came.

He could but clutch the chair on which he sat, and sit and stare and stare. There was no God!

The revellers below had heard the lawyer go, and wondered Mr. Grey did not come down. But he was not the man to meddle lightly with, and so they only wondered. But when the minutes grew to half an hour their curiosity became too much for them, and Edith was sent up to see what was the matter.

She started at the sight of Mr. Grey, who stared at her as though he did not recognize her, and for a moment could not speak ; and so the two stayed gazing at each other.

But Mr. Grey did recognize her, and the sight of her suggested Ernest, as it always did; and with the thought of Ernest came again the thought of "Mrs. Vane." Great heaven, it was from Ernest's lips that he had heard that name !

"God bless you, Edith !" he exclaimed, so suddenly that he quite frightened her.

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"God bless you! for there *is* a God. I was an impious wretch to doubt it. He has heard my prayer, and He *has* sent an angel down, and He has made my daughter her!"

"Papa! what is the matter?" exclaimed white-faced Edith.

"Nothing, my dear, nothing," answered Mr. Grey, resuming his accustomed manner. "Don't say anything about it, but I have to go to London by the midnight mail, and it has rather put me out."

Edith followed him downstairs with wondering grey eyes, but had sufficient common sense to hold her tongue. How often common sense consists in simple silence!

Mr. Grey's announcement of his sudden call to London threw the company into a state of consternation; but no man could be more quietly determined when he liked

than Mr. Grey, and no man could more resolutely keep his reasons to himself. Although they all were taken quite aback by his determination, nobody demurred—not even Mrs. Grey. She was a foolish woman, but she had more sense than that. So, in a minute, both the girls were busily engaged in packing Mr. Grey's portmanteau.

"How long will you be away, James?" asked his wife.

"I don't know," he replied; and that was all that passed.

There was no time to lose. The local train which joined the mail on the main line left Cornfield in about ten minutes. But the willing hands had soon got the portmanteau packed, and Mr. Grey stood all equipped for starting, when a sudden impulse seized him, and he said, "Girls, I should like you both to see me off."

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The girls were in an ecstasy, and had their things on in a moment; and the party, except Mrs. Grey, all started for the station. It was close at hand, and they were just in time.

The train was drawn up to the platform, and the bright green engine shining in the gaslight hissed and gurgled, and poured forth a stream of dense white steam, which rushed and roared into the frosty air. It stood like an impatient race-horse anxious for the start.

The porters, who were always glad to work for Mr. Grey, had soon established him in the most snug compartment they could find. The guard himself put in two foot-warmers, the station-master hoped that he would have a comfortable journey, and the very stoker, who was looking down the carriages from his position on the

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engine, said to his companion who was going to drive the train, "No larks this journey, Bill: we've got old Grey on board."

The doors were banged to, and the station-master whistled. The engine snorted, the wheels shuddered round, and with a heavy groan the train began to move and pant upon its way.

"Good-bye, papa."

"Good-bye, Grey."

"Good-bye, Bonamy; good-bye, girls; and God bless you, Edith."

The train glided off, swept round the curve, and left them gazing at that vanishing red light which is the emblem of farewell.

Gaze after him, girls, gaze! Gaze after the dear father whom your hearts have gone with. Don't go yet! Gaze after him—for you will never see him more.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE WORLD GOES ON.

"The wind returneth again according to his circuits."—*Ecclesiastes*.

It was no use. Ernest could not work. His pen would not keep upon the paper. It kept wandering upon the leather of his desk and on his finger nails; and one especial little wart he happened then to have upon the middle finger of his left hand got imprinted on his eyes and photographed upon his mind for ever. He had given up the drama in disgust, and he was now engaged upon a sort of satire, through the medium

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of which he wanted to convey a few of the ideas which were churning in his brain. How many new ones he had had this week ! A week is not a very long time ; only long enough to write a sermon in, to burst a pimple, for a cut to heal, or for a woman to forget a man ; but what a world of thought and feeling one may live through in a week !

The satire was not published—was not even finished. Its remains are lying now in Ernest's desk ; as many a work with good stuff in it is now lying in its author's desk, which not a publisher has seen, and not a publisher would look at if he saw ; whilst the weak flux of female folly floods the world.

He could not finish it. Why should he ? Is it possible for any man to write what has not been already written ? Does anything remain unsaid ? Can anybody gaze

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at any library—can anybody walk through the Museum and regard its groaning shelves—and dare to write a book until his mind has thrown off the remembrance? “Of making many books there is no end,” indeed.

Why should he finish it? It probably would not be read; and if it was, would probably be disapproved. Nay, even if it made him famous—if it lifted him above the common ruck of fools, and gave him an identity—what of it? Was there any object in achieving fame, except to make himself illustrious in her eyes whom he loved? And if she did not value reputation—if she had renounced him—if she did not love him—if she took no interest in what he did, or what he was, or what became of him—what else remained, except the weary hope of sowing some small grain of good for poor

humanity, that might come up in twice a thousand years ?

Old men can toil, and fight, and suffer, for a horse and carriage, a blue riband, or an ermine gown ; but young men see that these are trumpery toys. The time will come to Ernest yet when he will have forgotten these depressions of his youth ; when he will have got used to life, and reconciled to all its vanities ; and he will toil, and fight, and suffer for as little. But at present he is only just perceiving “all *is* vanity ;” and this discovery has quenched the spirit in his heart and blanched the very sun.

Still he was happier than he had been. His new moral sense was an amazing comfort. He could walk the streets at night, and feel that a large portion of the degradation which he saw was human folly and the consequence of human laws—not human

wickedness and not the consequence of laws of God which never can be changed. He could feel pity and affection where before he had been able to feel nothing but contempt. It was a happier feeling even not to know where Rosamond might be than it had been to look upon her with contempt.

Of course he wondered where she was. He could do nothing for his wondering. These wilful disappearances—these selfish abrogations of all intercourse and all communication with the ones who love us—are too cruel. They cannot be endured and suffered out like death ; for they are always there—abiding pangs—which we may thrust aside for hours and days, but which come back to us eternally in the silence of the night and in the bustle of the day, and smite us down again and paralyse our powers.

He wondered whether she had given up Harry Bonamy. He wondered whether Harry Bonamy had given up her. He dare not write and ask him, or he should betray the confidence she had reposed in him. No, he could only stand aside, and watch his rival in his second love be married to his first. It was not easy to be silent. He had even thought, just once, it was his duty to communicate with Mr. Grey. But it was only for a moment. After that he never thought again of violating honour to do good.

Yes, Harry Bonamy had given up Rosamond ; but Rosamond had not given him up. She had written to him, saying that she could not leave him so ; that if there had to be an end of their connection she must say good-bye to him. She would not trouble him again, but she must see him

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once. And Harry felt that this was only right. Apart from right, he could not have endured to have left Rosamond for ever on a sheet of note-paper. It could not help but be a painful parting ; but he had to face it. We must reap one or two of our wild oats ourselves. And at the time when Ernest was bemoaning her beside the dripping fountain, Harry was upon his way to say good-bye to her.

In the midst of Ernest's meditations came the doctor. Nothing much depends upon his visit, but inasmuch as it will be his last appearance in this little history I may be pardoned for referring to it.

The frank face with the mutton-chop whiskers which began this tale, has grown into a rather solemn visage now. I fancy somewhere in that royal college which turns out our surgeons there must be a

professor and a class, which no outsiders ever hear of, for the special study of demeanour. That grave face with which all surgeons feel a pulse or put a spoon upon a tongue, is quite a study. It is not the hypocritical solemnity of the parson, which is humbug and which looks it. It is a different sort of seriousness, which is humbug and which doesn't look it. Nay, it positively gives you confidence. A frisky doctor frightens one. But it is an art which must take years of study to be able to examine Mr. Jones's gum-boil with as much solemnity as if it were a cancer. Jones is gratified, of course ; and I have not a word to say against it. But when the little trick of trade assumes a chronic form and spreads into the private life, it is intolerable to an old associate.

“Confound you, George, don't look at

me like that," said Ernest. "I have nothing wrong with my complexion, have I?"

"I beg your pardon," laughed the surgeon; "I forgot you weren't a patient. I've just come from one, and am just going to another"—pulling out the everlasting watch.  
"By Jove, I have no time to spare!"

"What did you come at all for, if you have no time to spare?"

"Well, Ernest, the fact is I came to tell you something."

There was a curious constraint about the surgeon's manner. He twirled his hat, and looked up at the ceiling, and seemed altogether very ill at ease.

"What is it?" asked the barrister.

"It's rather a long story, and I really haven't time to tell you all about it now."

"Well, call again to-morrow."

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“No, I’d better tell you the main fact. I’ll tell you the particulars some other day. By jingo, it’s five minutes past !”

“Well, out with your main fact, then.”

“Well, the fact is, Ernest, I’m—I’m—”

“What, man ?”

“Going to be married.”

There was nothing very singular in the announcement, but it was as much as Ernest could believe. George Drummond going to be married. He could not realise it. There was something he rebelled against in the idea ; and it somehow made him sick at heart. It was as much as he could do to muster up sufficient interest and politeness to ask whom the surgeon was about to marry.

“Oh, it’s a patient,” blushed the surgeon.

“Humph ! nice goings-on,” remarked the barrister ; and then, with the remembrance

of that conversation with which this tale opened, he inquired with quite a tinge of sarcasm, “Is she a seraph?”

But the sarcasm had no effect upon the surgeon, who had no remembrance of the conversation, and he only answered, “No ; but she’s a very nice girl. Bless my soul, it’s close upon a quarter past !”

He gave Ernest a few more particulars, with many glances at his watch meanwhile, and Ernest managed to congratulate him ; but he could take no interest in this second love affair, and was not sorry when the everlasting watch showed twenty minutes past, and the surgeon said good-bye, and vanished down the stairs, and from this history.

George Drummond going to be married, and but two years’ growth of grass upon the grave of Agnes Vane, who lay in the

ground smiling at the thought of meeting him again.

It is a blessed dispensation which enables us to forget and to go on ; but it is a grim satire on the poverty and vanity of life, that we are only able to be happy through inconstancy and frailty. If at this moment we could see ourselves as we shall be a year hence, oh, how we should loathe ourselves ! How we do loathe ourselves and our mean natures if we think of them !

But Ernest was too hard upon the doctor. It was feeling and not judgment which condemned him. The love of George for Agnes had not been that grand absorbing passion which he had imagined it. George Drummond was not the sort of man to feel a grand absorbing passion. It requires more brains than George possessed. It

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wants a bigger nature. Only a great mind is capable of a great passion. Hearts and minds are not the separate and distinct things they are commonly considered. It is not the blood-pump in the breast which loves ; it is the brains. And if the brains are not immense, the passion cannot be tremendous. And George's brains were not immense. They were quite good enough for his profession, or for any other ; he had the observant, critical, and analytic faculties ; but he had nothing of those grander powers which sweep "from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven," and take in all that is beneath the sun ; whose instincts are not bounded by philosophies ; whose lives are larger and whose passions mean more than the lives and passions of the ruck of men. George Drummond was the sort of man to work at commonplaces and not feel their

commonplaceness—to be respectable, and get on in the world. His love for Agnes Vane was only six months' growth ; and had she been alive he would have loved her still : but she was dead ; two years had passed over her grave ; and he was going to be married. The sun sets, and the sun ariseth ; and the world goes on.

Ernest had not reconciled himself to the idea, when he heard another footstep coming up the stairs. It was a strange one—and a slow one—and a heavy one. It stopped at Ernest's door, and one knock summoned him. He opened it, and scarcely could believe his eyes when he saw standing on the threshold—Mr. Grey. Stay—was that white-faced grizzled man the jolly corn-factor ? Yes, it was Mr. Grey.

## CHAPTER V.

## RETRIBUTION.

“ Sentence against a wicked work is not executed speedily.”—*Ecclesiastes*.

SMALL wonder Ernest hardly recognised him, for he had been travelling all night, and not a wink of sleep had visited his reeling brain. His face was drawn and haggard, and he had not shaved that morning—not because he had not time, for he scarce knew what he was going to do, but that he did not dare to trust his trembling hand. He was an old man now.

"You are surprised to see me," he remarked, when Ernest had bestowed him in the easiest chair he had.

"I am delighted," answered Ernest. "It is quite a treat to see you sitting there."

Mr. Grey smiled sadly. It would have been a treat for him to sit there once ; but he was past treats now.

"But you're not looking well," continued Ernest.

"I am not well, Ernest. I am very ill. I mean at heart. I have come to speak to you, and tell you things that I would speak of to no other living man. I always loved you, Ernest, and you loved my daughter."

Ernest coloured.

"It is no time to stand on ceremony. I know you did ; and if your love had been returned as it deserved to be, it would have

been my greatest happiness to have bestowed her so. But God has otherwise ordained. Still, Ernest, knowing that you loved her draws me to you, and this morning I am going to place in you my utmost confidence."

Mr. Grey paused, and Ernest could not speak, but felt that he had then received the greatest honour which his life would know.

"I had two other daughters, Ernest. One of them was born before I married Mrs. Grey. The other was born—God knows when. Their mother was the goddess of my life. For long she was the sun in my life's sky, and she has been for the last twenty years my sweetest memory. She was an actress, Ernest, and my father would not let us marry. We were separated. Wickedly I gave her up, but not from any selfish

motive. It broke my heart and blasted all my life, but it was out of feeling for my father, and to get her and my daughter a subsistence. Wickedly I promised I would never see or speak to her again. I never did. A short time afterwards they told me both of them were dead, and I agreed to marry Mrs. Grey. It was a lie. I never knew until last night that both of them survived. Nay, more, my darling had another daughter I was never told of, and I never heard of her until last night."

Again he paused to wipe away the tears which gathered in his eyes.

"It seems they have been living all these years, and one of them—my younger daughter, whom I never saw—is living now. But Ernest, though I never saw her you have seen her. Your hands have touched her. You have known her."

It did not need for Mr. Grey to add the name adopted by her mother was the name of Vane, for Ernest to know Rosamond.

"Oh, Ernest, you can't tell the happiness it is to me in my great grief to feel that you have been beside my Helen and her daughters when I was far away. If ever they had wanted help you would have given it them. They would not come to any harm while they knew you. They were not desolate. Though I deserted them, they were not desolate."

Still Ernest could not speak. It was a revelation to him. He could do nothing but sit very still and think of those sad eyes of Mrs. Vane which always seemed to look into the past. He knew what they were looking back at now. He knew now why she had thought more of Agnes than of Rosamond, why Agnes had been her

existence, why her death had killed her. Agnes was the daughter who had sat upon the knee of him whom she had loved. Now he could understand the depth of her despair, and he was thankful that he had not thought too hardly of her last sad fall.

And as he sat and looked at Mr. Grey, and thought of all the goodness and the kindness in that broken heart, and thought of all the sweetness and the beauty and the patience he remembered in the face of Mrs. Vane, he could not help the thought of what a happy, happy pair they would have been, and what a happy, happy home would have been theirs. The things which have been missed in this life are amongst its solemnest of sorrows.

“ Speak to me about them, Ernest. Tell me of them—all you know.”

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Ernest talked to him about them for a long time. Every grace and beauty he had known in them he dwelt upon, and every happy thing that he could say of them he said. He passed as lightly as he could over the death of Mrs. Vane. He told him rather of her kindness and her goodness and her beauty, and the love that was between her and her daughters. He told him how he had been present at the death-bed of the one that died, and how she had departed with a smile upon her face. He told him he had stood beside the grave of Mrs. Vane when tenderly her griefs were buried in the dust. And every word he said fell like a drop of balm upon the old man's heart, and as he listened and the picture of his love was drawn before his eyes, his face, all haggard and unshaven as it was, glowed like an angel's.

Ernest had a photograph of Rosamond. He brought it; and the old man took it in his trembling hands; but it was no use. He could not see it through the mist of tears which rose before his eyes.

But whilst he held it in his hand the thought occurred to Ernest for the first time—Edith and Rosamond were sisters: they were both in love with the same man; he had abandoned one, and was upon the point of being married to the other. And the horror of it froze his blood; and he felt surely it was now the time to speak. But when the words were almost on his lips the face of Rosamond rose up before him, and he heard her voice say, “Ernest, you have deserved my confidence, and I will give it you.” He did deserve it, and was silent. It was “a time to keep silence.”

He did right. It was as though the

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devil himself had tempted him ; and still he did not fall. But it was not the devil. It was God.

“ I cannot see it,” said Mr. Grey at last ; “ but tell me about Rosamond. I hear she ran away.”

Then Ernest told him of her flight ; how she had gone upon the stage ; how fate had led her to Cornfield ; how he had recognised her in the pantomime. And Mr. Grey thought piteously how his daughter had been living in a dingy lodging close beside her father’s comfortable home. And all at once he thought of the fair girl who passed his window that cold winter’s day, whose face reminded him of his lost love ; to whom a sudden impulse made him send those flowers ; and he remembered he had sent them “ with an old man’s blessing ;” and again the tears welled over. He had been

rewarded for that little kindness. He had blessed his daughter without knowing it.

Next Ernest told him how he had procured her an engagement at a London theatre ; how she had not pleased the critics ; and how she had fled a second time. He told him also how he had loved her as well as Edith, and how she had rejected him because she did not love him. And the old man took both Ernest's hands in his, in pity for the lad whom he admired and who would have been twice his son, but who had been despised by both his daughters.

Then he wanted to be shown the house where Mrs. Vane had lived, and Rosamond's last lodgings, and the grave. And Ernest took him in a cab to Kensington. He gazed upon the little white house lovingly. New people had it now, but it

was still there, and it was the house in which his love had died.

A little child was playing with her nurse upon the grass, and came up to the gate and looked at him.

Mr. Grey, who never could withstand a pretty face, took her up tenderly into his arms, to which the child came willingly.

He kissed her, and producing half a sovereign, told her to put that into her money-box.

The child ran in and told her mother “Such a nice gentleman had given her that.”

They went to Rosamond’s apartments. No, nothing had been heard of her. But Mr. Grey went in and saw the bed where she had lain. And then they drove out to the cemetery. Ernest pointed out the grave, and Mr. Grey said he would like to

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be alone. He would call on Ernest the next day, and they would search for Rosamond. So Ernest said good-bye, and left him at the grave. He turned round when he reached the gate, and took a last long look at him. He was standing with his hat off by the tomb. And Ernest afterwards was glad he took that last long look. It was the last he ever saw of Mr. Grey.

The old man stood for a long time beside the grave, and gazed upon the little spot of earth where his dead darling lay. And presently he knelt and kissed the sods.

There were a number of bystanders round. Most of them turned away, but some of them advanced, and gazed at the inscription on the tomb. It mattered not to Mr. Grey.

Beneath that marble lay the woman he had loved : with what the world had called a

guilty love. Guilty or not, his heart was in that grave. The very weeds which grew on it were sacred things : they had been nurtured by her dust. He gathered one, and placed it in his coat.

He looked at all the tombs around. He had a gentle thought for all whose ashes lay beside his love's. For whom had he not gentle thoughts ? Upon that holy spot, and under the sweet influence which that dead love exerted on him even from the grave, he had a tender thought for everybody—even for his father ; and with his feet upon the sods which covered her, and with his hat in hand, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, recalled the curse he had pronounced, and solemnly forgave him.

There he stood until the dusk of that short winter's day, until he could no longer read the letters on the tomb, and then he

slowly said good-bye to it, and went to his hotel.

He had not tasted food that day, but he had been so comforted by all that he had heard from Ernest, and was so subdued and softened by the solemn influences of his love and all the throng of sweetest memories it had awaked, he felt that he could even eat, and took some slight refreshment, and sought sleep.

To think that, whether in delight or in despair, we always have to eat! What mere machines we are! We have to lay our coals in like a locomotive.

Alas! how soon sweet, softening influences lose their hold upon us. As he sat and talked to Ernest, and as he had stood beside that sacred grave, he had felt almost easy about Rosamond. He was upon her track, and he should find her. He was at

peace with God, and everything would work out for the best. But as those softening influences faded from his heart, the consciousness returned that he had not found Rosamond, and was as far from her as ever.

Reader, have you ever had a little pain—one of those tiny, unaccountable little pains which make a man think, “Goodness me ! is anything the matter with my heart ?”—and have you ever thrust the foolish fancy back into your mind, and got engrossed in some absorbing occupation, until you have thought, “Good gracious, what a fool I was to fancy there was anything the matter ! God has blessed my task ; He is well pleased with me, and will not hurt me ;” and all at once the little pain has come back, to remind you that though God has blessed the mental occupation He has

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cursed the physical disorder, and that they are two quite separate things, and the old terror has returned.

It was so now with Mr. Grey. He felt the exaltation he had been in was an exaltation of the spirit and had no connection with the stern, cold facts of life, which calmly waited till he should come out of it, and then stood there the same.

He was no nearer Rosamond than ever. Ernest could not help him ; nobody could help him. It was vain to try to sleep. Again he went into the streets, and tried to walk away the horror which oppressed him.

It was quite dark now. It had been dark some hours : the streets were all ablaze with light from the shop-windows. Everything was going on as usual. The cabs, and carts, and omnibuses rattled to and fro ; the

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shopkeepers were selling their adulterated wares ; the people jostled him. What did they care for Rosamond ?

He went out on the Waterloo Bridge. The toll-taker cared nought for Rosamond. He had to pay his half-penny. How hideous these commonplaces seemed !

He gazed upon the panorama of the great flat city with its myriad lights ; which stretched before him upon either hand as far as he could see. He looked upon the gleaming lamps of the embankment, sweeping in one regular almost unbroken line from the big yellow clock at Westminster—which stared out of the distant night like a dropped moon—to where the dusky dome of old St. Paul's loomed dimly. The limelight flashed above the clock at Westminster, and told him that the English parliament was sitting in that black still

night, making those human laws which are so powerful and powerless. Oh where in all that great flat city was his Rosamond ?

He gazed upon the pitch-black river which was running underneath him. It was streaming on.

Ah, Mr. Grey, your hour at last has come, and you are working out the retribution of your youthful sin. It has been long in gathering to this supreme intensity, but it has all the time been gathering. Not all the good that you have done in all your life, not all your toil nor all your hospitality of twenty years have wiped it out. No good can wipe out evil. Each goes on. Your punishment has been awaiting you as sure as your rewards.

Is it not terrible to think we cannot do a deed but it goes on for ever? and for good or ill its retribution is awaiting us or some

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one else throughout all time, through joy and sorrow, failure and success. That which is done is done, and neither God nor man can make it undone.

There are unrighteous retributions by the thousand. Nature abounds in them. But Mr. Grey's is righteous enough, for it is the direct and necessary consequence of his misdeed. He had betrayed his love. He had been false to his own heart. He had sacrificed himself. And though a thousand pulpits shriek the contrary—in every page of the whole book of life nature is thundering forth the everlasting truth that man has no more right to sacrifice himself than anybody else. What does it matter to the gods that the injustice is committed by the man himself? It is injustice, and is damned.

But no man hears. The pulpits go on

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shrieking—"Sacrifice yourselves, sacrifice yourselves! do yourself wrong for others' sake! shatter your hearts! suppress your passions! mutilate your natures! violate your souls! It is the noblest heroism. It is the thing most pleasing in the sight of God." And though the heavens thunder back the answer—"Fools and blind! blind leaders of the blind! it is a sin, on which is set our everlasting curse!"—the pulpits go on shrieking, and a maudlin piety usurps the throne of truth.

As Mr. Grey had sinned against his love it was through his love that he was punished. When a man offends against the social laws we ostracise him altogether: we not only turn him out of the society he has offended, but we will have no dealings with him even in quite other matters in which he has done well. We do not stay to think

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that by the selfsame law by which we punish him for his offence it is our duty to reward him for his merit. Even nature is not so unjust as that. She did not punish Mr. Grey in business matters, where he had been enterprising and energetic : in those he succeeded : but she punished him in love, in which he had been false.

He had been false indeed. No matter that he had done wrong with the most exemplary motives, he had done wrong all the same, and consequences do not care a fig for motives. He had loved and he had “made a lie.” What greater wrong can a man do—although men do it every day and women every hour? To give love up to satisfy a law, to please a father, or to spare a friend, is to be false to the profoundest feeling in our nature, it is to betray our inmost soul, it is the flattest

blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. What crime was Judas's who but betrayed a confidence for silver, to the crime of him or her who will renounce a love to satisfy a father? No wrong in life is greater, save the father's who exacts the sacrifice, and who, with one foot in the grave, dangles his heart before his children's eyes and tells them they will break it if they are not false. The daughters fall—it is no fault of theirs: they have not strength to stand: but they must all the same be broken by their fall. Even the sons fall sometimes, as Mr. Grey had fallen. The younger life is made a sacrifice. And having done under the sun what mischief it was able, and bequeathed to time what misery it might, the wretched heart which was not broken crumbles into dust and is forgotten in the grave.

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The old man crossed the bridge and wandered on, he knew not where, he knew not why. He passed the Obelisk. He wandered up the London Road. He turned into St. George's, and went wandering on to Westminster. He crossed the bridge and wandered past the tall clock-tower which rose majestic in the black night air. As he passed under it it struck eleven, but still he wandered on.

Would his grief never end ?

I dare say you have sometimes stood upon the platform of some roadside station, reader, when a long, long luggage-train has slowly lumbered through. And as the heavy waggons have rolled past you one after the other you have thought, "Will this train never end ?" But in a moment it is gone, the red light glimmers in the distance and then vanishes, the line shines

bright and clear : and you are thinking  
“ Will there never come another train ?”

It was so with Mr. Grey. It is so with all life. It seems eternal, and it is a breath. He thought his grief was going to last for ever. But it was nearly over.

He wandered on, up Parliament Street, up Whitehall, and through Trafalgar Square. He wandered up the Haymarket, up Regent Street, and into Oxford Street. He wandered on, up Oxford Street, and into Holborn. It was midnight now ; but still he wandered on ; until his progress was arrested by a crowd of people who were pouring out of a saloon in Holborn. He stood and gazed upon the pallid men and painted women who were getting into cabs and driving off.

A man who knew him by sight happened to be passing, and walked on, exclaiming

to himself, “Why, if there isn’t old Grey ! He’s positively come out of the Holborn !” and always afterwards when Mr. Grey was spoken of said he could tell a tale about him if he liked, and of course told it and sowed evil judgments far and wide.

But Mr. Grey saw nothing except what was straight before his bloodshot eyes, and that was Harry Bonamy, whom he had left by Edith’s side. He was beside another woman now, a painted woman like the rest. No, no, not like the rest, and yet like something—what ? Good God—like Helen Douglas ! It was she ! It needed nothing more. In that poor painted girl the father recognised his child.

He clung hold of a lamp-post for support. He could not speak. He could not move. His heart’s desire was right before him, and

he could not speak to her. They got into a cab and drove away. His heart's desire was driving off into the wide world again, and still he could not move.

But it was of small consequence. He had the clue to her if Harry had. It was not that which whirled within his brain. His thoughts were turned into a different channel now, and were more horrible than ever.

Oh, why was he not punished right out then when he betrayed his love? He could have borne it then. He would have felt its justice then, and even have rejoiced in it. But after all these years—when he believed that he had made his peace with heaven! Why had the sentence not been executed then? Oh, God! that it should not be executed until now!

He thought of all the tales that he had

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heard of Harry—of his intimacy with the actress in Cornfield—of Harry's going to London—of her following him—of Mr. Bonamy's distress—and of his promise. And then he thought of Rosamond's painted face, and his brain reeled. But oh, how sweet it looked for all its paint—how beautiful—how like his Helen's ! She was his daughter, and the daughter of his darling, and his heart went out to her. But Harry ! Harry, who was going to marry Edith, knew her ; and he guessed the rest. His brains were boiling. He must walk it off. He staggered to his feet and wandered on.

The street was getting very quiet now. He was not jostled ; and he cried, and wept, and talked aloud as he went on. Unkempt, unshaven, haggard, with wild eyes, and talking to himself, he staggered past a couple of policemen.

“Drunk,” said Dogberry to Verges.

“And disorderly,” said Verges. “I’ve half a mind to run him in.”

But Verges didn’t, and he wandered on. Poor, jolly, hospitable corn-factor! The kettle was then hissing in the cosy parlour, and the spoons were rattling, and the girls were wondering where papa was.

Want of food and sleep and the long labour he had taken were now telling on his brains, and a dull pain oppressed his heart. He was almost delirious, and his thoughts grew wilder and more horrible than ever. He jumped and trembled at the slightest sound.

Suppose he were to die that night, what would become of Rosamond? He thought of that fair painted face thrown helpless on the world, and shuddered as he thought.

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He had now wandered right into the city—into what would be the heart of the city, if the city had a heart. He stood upon the flags in front of the Exchange, and gazed upon the rows of brightly shining lamps and on the glistening grey stone with which he was surrounded. Not a soul was to be seen.

Have you ever been into the city between twelve and one o'clock at night? Then go. It is sublime in desolation.

He wandered down Cheapside and turned into St. Paul's Churchyard. That was a desert too.

Another horror shook his tottering reason. Those religious fears which sometimes haunted him came dancing like so many devils through his brain. The thought of all the black beliefs his pious father had inculcated came rushing on his mind.

Then they were true. God was the

gloomy tyrant whom he had been taught to fear, who gloated over mortal misery and burnt men's souls in hell. It must be all true. Nothing was too horrible to be believed. He had offended against God, and he would never be forgiven. His soul was lost for ever. That very night he might be summoned to the Throne, and the eternal wrath be visited upon him. Great heaven ! what was that ?

A loud report banged out into the night and woke the echoes of the silent air.

To Mr. Grey it was the crack of doom. A fork of lightning seemed to pierce his heart, and he fell down upon the pavement —dead.

“ Where did you find him ? ” the inspector asked of the policeman who had brought the news.

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“I found him in St. Paul’s Church-yard.”

“What time was it?”

“St. Paul’s had just struck One.”

## CHAPTER VI.

## MARRIAGE BELLS.

"Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest, all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun."—*Ecclesiastes*.

I WILL not dwell upon the grief which fell upon that cosy parlour in Cornfield when it received the news. There has been enough of sorrow in this little tale. Enough to say that Mrs. Grey forgot her ailments in her genuine affliction, and did not marry her next husband for two years. I cannot write the depth of grief with which the daughters mourned the father they had idolised. The kettle did not

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hiss again upon the hob, the fancy-work was laid aside, and the duets were silenced. They had loved him with a genuine love, and it appeared at first as if all interest in life had gone—as if there was no life—as if its wheels had stopped and its mainspring was broken—as if they never could be happy any more. But they were happy again by-and-by, and though the thought of their dead father did not often leave them, it gradually ceased to be a thought of pain, and grew to be a sweet and pleasant memory.

Mr. Grey was easily identified by letters which were found upon him. One of them had been from Mr. Bonamy ; and by a happy instinct, it was he whom the police communicated with, and it was he who had conveyed the news to Mrs. Grey and to the girls. He telegraphed to Ernest, and it was

Ernest who attended at the inquest—where the verdict was, of course, that he had died of heart disease—and travelled with his dead old friend to Yorkshire.

He was buried in a cemetery just outside Cornfield. Ernest was conscious he would rather have been laid beside his love, and have their dust commingle in that Brompton grave. But he could not have given a reason for so curious a course without betraying the sad secret which had been entrusted to his keeping and inflicting a still greater grief on Mrs. Grey. And so they were separated in death as they had been separated in life. And it was proper that they should be. Mr. Grey had given up Helen Douglas and allowed his life to split away from hers. That they should be divided in their deaths was part of his reward.

The Greys were in no humour for a wed-

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ding. Neither were the Bonamys ; for Mr. Bonamy was broken-hearted at the loss of his old friend, and even Harry's spirits were depressed—the parting between him and Rosamond had been so dreadful. Mr. Bonamy was overcome with grief to think that he should never again grasp Mr. Grey's kind hand, and hear his hearty voice, and drink his whiskey, and complain of him for not returning trumps. It is no light matter to lose a friend of thirty years. There is a halo of association round him which there is not round another. He cannot be replaced. The loss of Mr. Grey made a great gap in Mr. Bonamy's existence—seemed to break its continuity and make a fresh start necessary—and reminded him that his turn was at hand. Mr. Bonamy was rather old to make fresh starts, but he was vigorous, and he made one. He had other friends, and he

betook himself to them, and found that they had qualities he never had suspected in them and an interest he would not have believed. And now his voice rings jollily as ever ; he cracks the old jokes with the old success, and calls out “Come, come, play,” as tetchily as ever. But he often thinks of Mr. Grey.

Still though they none of them were in the humour for a wedding the wedding had to be. They could not but remember Mr. Grey’s remark — upon the evening Mrs. Grey indulged in that foreboding she now shuddered to remember—that he wished the wedding to take place upon the twenty-eighth of February, whether he was there or not—“Bonamy, you’ll see to that.” And Mr. Bonamy did see to it. The twenty-eighth of February came just as quickly and as slowly as it would have done if Mr. Grey

had been alive. What did Mr. Grey's death matter to the twenty-eighth of February? And so the joy-bells rang.

They did not ring so very merrily in Edith's ears as she had thought they would. The day they had appointed for a day of gladness was a day of sadness. How often it is so! It seems as though the gods delighted in expressing their contempt for our arrangements and exhibiting the vanity of human plans. But cheer up, Edith. You are going to be married to the man you love. The joy-bells ring more happily for you than many a girl who has not lost her father, but is going to the altar to conciliate that father's love by offering up her broken heart and ruined life a sacrifice of shame.

Ernest was present at the wedding. It was not a pleasant ceremony for him to be present at, but he has come to the conclu-

sion that there are no pleasant ceremonies. Nay, when the parson asked if there was any reason why the two should not be joined together, it was very painful ; but the reason that he knew of always was a confidence, and now it was a double confidence. He was not frightened by the parson's solemn tones : he knew the parson privately, and knew that he was an impostor, who talked tittle-tattle, retailed scandal, and read other people's letters : and he felt satisfied that it was not "a time to speak."

But as he looked on those grey eyes of Edith's and thought of those brown eyes of Rosamond, and looked at his successful rival standing there as piously as any one, his heart was very heavy and his face was very stern.

Nor was the sternness lessened when the promise came, and Edith took it lightly on

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her lips. That awful promise—to control our hearts and govern our affections—which it is not in the power of any man to keep, but which men think so little of and women nothing.

Oh, these parsons and their beautiful morality ! Just fancy a controlled affection and a governed love ! Oh, what a happy wife that wife must be whose husband loves her from a sense of duty !

“ I don’t like that Mr. Tempest,” said one of the spectators—a young lady—to her friend. “ He looks so cold and stern.”

“ Oh, horrible !” returned the friend. “ But doesn’t Harry look nice ?”

“ Oh, he does !” And both of the young ladies wished that they were Edith.

Harry has made many conquests and done many wrongs, but ah, how many more he might have made and done !

And now the boy and girl are man and wife, and Ernest's hopes in that direction are crushed out of him for ever. Everybody is congratulating the new bride and bridegroom, except him. He was not mean by nature or ungenerous, but he could not do it. It was not that he did not wish them every happiness, but that his lips refused to frame the words. But Edith never noticed the omission.

Will all these hopes be realised? Will they be happy? Yes, they will. Harry is not a middle-aged rake confirmed in evil habits. He has only been a very wild young man, as many a good wife and loving mother would have been a very wild young woman if she had had the chance. He has done far more harm than most, but he has done it out of carelessness and vanity—not wickedness. He will be an average hus-

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band. He will at least outwardly attend to the proprieties, and that is all the world requires. It doesn't matter how a man feels inwardly. Neither he nor Edith love the other with a love so great that it will not run smoothly. He is not the sort of man who will neglect his wife or quarrel with the world. He is too easy-going and good-natured to do that. They will be happy. They will be an average pair.

Ernest had another pleasure that day : and that was to ride to London in the train which took the newly married pair, who had selected London for their resting-place. I don't know whether you who read these lines have ever travelled in one compartment of a train in the society of two old ladies with the asthma, whilst the woman—I won't say whom you loved, but whom you might have loved under other circum-

stances—rode in the next compartment with another man. The cushions may be of the softest, the appointments of the carriage may be of the most luxurious, your ticket may have cost whatever you like—you ride third class that journey.

“Good-bye,” cried Harry through the window.

“Good-bye,” said Mr. Bonamy and Hester on the platform.

“I shall write to-morrow,” added Edith, who I may say was not in tears.

“Good-bye,” said everybody, and the train rolled off.

We notice many curious coincidences as we go through life, but for every one which we notice there are twenty which we never know of. The train and carriage and compartment which were taking Edith to her life, were the same train and carriage and

compartment which had taken Mr. Grey to his death, and the same engine-driver drove them.

Ernest was not sorry when the journey was accomplished, and they all alighted at King's Cross. He could just contrive to say the words now.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Bonamy: I hope you will be very happy."

"We mean to be," cried Harry.

But Edith only held her hand out, and said, "Good-bye, Mr. Tempest."

"Good-bye, Mr. Tempest." That was the result of Ernest's sighs and groans of half-a-dozen years! And Harry drove off with his bride, to live with her, to be the father of her children, to be buried in her grave. And that was the result of Harry's love-making of half-a-dozen weeks.

"Good-bye, Mr. Tempest." The words

were ringing in his ears as he betook himself to Temple Bar. He heard them in the rattle of the cabs along the road; and when he reached the Strand, St. Clement Danes had positively changed its tune, and in the place of "oranges and lemons" it was softly singing, "Good-bye, Mr. Tempest."

He passed two students standing talking in his court; and as he passed, the one said "good-bye" to the other. Ernest stopped, and wondered why he didn't add the rest.

As usual, he could neither read nor write. Even his tobacco seemed to have quite lost its flavour. Perhaps it was a bad lot: he would go and buy some fresh. But when he had done that, his footsteps somehow would not take him home. He didn't know where to go, so he just let his footsteps take him where they chose. They took him a long way—right out to

Brompton Cemetery ; and he was glad they did ; he was in just the humour for a cemetery. He would pay a visit to the grave where lay the mother and where last he had beheld the father of the girls he loved.

It was now dusk and almost closing-time, but still the gates were open, and he sauntered towards the grave. He could perceive it in the gloomy distance long before he came to it, for he knew it well. But he was not the only one who knew it. Somebody was there before him : a dim, dusky figure stooped above the grave.

As he approached, it heard his footstep and turned towards him a white pallid face, and seeing some one coming rose and fled.

In that white pallid face—not painted now—he recognised the face of Rosamond.

Again their paths had crossed, but only to diverge again. He followed her retreating figure till it plunged behind some trees. When he had passed the trees, he thought he saw it in the distance standing still ; but when he got a little nearer to the object, found it was not Rosamond : only the emblem of the life of Rosamond—a broken pillar. He had taken the wrong turning and had lost her.

Their paths never crossed again.

Fair Rosamond ! she is wandering somewhere now, bearing that painted face beneath the silent stars. It may be, reader, you will pass her in the street to-night, and dare to gaze upon her with contempt. It may be, lady reader, who are pranked in pride at the expense of her and such as she —the mistress of a happy home, which is built up upon their misery, and could not

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be without it—it may be, even you will pass her some day under the sun, and gather up your skirts as you go by.

But though you meet her or you meet her not, fair Rosamond will wander on the same, one victim more upon the holocaust of piety.

Oh God, if Thou hast ears to hear, and heart to feel, and power to do, come down to us ! The bloody sweat is standing on our brows ! The breaking hearts of half Thy children cry to Thee ! Come down, oh God, come down, and teach us charity !

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE LAST.

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.”  
*Ecclesiastes.*

ST. CLEMENT DANES is singing “oranges and lemons” once again. The fountain drips as usual. The tobacco has regained its flavour and is curling up in the familiar cloud, as Ernest sits in his arm-chair before the fire. It is his birthday. He would have forgotten all about it if he had not had a letter from his mother which reminded him that he was twenty-seven that day. Mothers do not forget birthdays, and

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no wonder. He has just read the letter, full of kind congratulations upon nothing and of hopes which will never be realised. Hopes never are. And he is sitting, thinking he has lived out seven and twenty years under the sun.

When first we knew him he was twenty-five, and perhaps the two years he has passed through are the two most pregnant years in a man's life, for they are those in which the wild vague thoughts of youth take form and shape and make a man of him. The law makes men of us at twenty-one, but nature is not in so great a hurry.

The years which he has passed through in our company have not been happy years. It is impossible for that to be a happy time in which a man becomes first deeply conscious of the awful mystery of life and cruelty of nature. Some men are never

conscious of it. They are early plunged in business or in pleasure, and they never think of things. But Ernest has had lots of time to think in these long days when the attorneys came not, and he could but sit and listen to the dripping of the fountain and the chime of old St. Clement's. But the time has not been lost. If it has made his face more sad it is with that sort of sadness by which "the heart is made better."

He has learnt a great deal in these days of his vanity, which he has spended as a shadow under the sun. And if the sum of all his learning only comes to what the Preacher preached—in grander words than ever fell from mortal lips before or since—three thousand years ago, that only shows how human generations pass away, and how "the earth abideth."

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In religion, Ernest never was a bigot. He had been educated in a wholesome horror of dramatic views upon a subject of which every man is absolutely ignorant. And even the opinions in which he had been educated had been rudely shaken. Those few thoughts George Drummond had struck out—which were not George's own, but arguments which he had heard and could not answer—were confirmed by every fresh experience of Ernest's life. And now he held his views upon religious matters, as every man of sense who thinks upon such subjects holds them—in solution. He did not let them crystallise into a creed, which must be wrong—for how can ignorance be right?—but was content to stand with his ears open to more knowledge and his eyes open to more light, and meanwhile bow before the mystery of mysteries.

He did not often go to church; and when he did he "kept his foot," and listened rather than communed. Of course he broke out now and then in heart-wrung cries and in involuntary prayers ; for human weakness must cry out to something, if it only be the air ; but in the commonplaces of devotion he could take no part. He had no sympathy with the philosophy that "everything is ordered for the best." The cries of the whole brute creation, outraged and oppressed by nature and by man, screamed out the contrary in shrieks which pierced his heart. He saw that nature teemed with wrongs, which no eternity can wipe away and may have never been. If God was good—which, taken as a whole, the scheme of the creation seemed to show—it seemed as if he could not be omnipotent. But God to him was not a person-

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ality, He was a mystery. Accordingly he heard and did not give “the sacrifice of fools,” who “considered not that they did evil.”

But it was in morals Ernest had progressed the most. He felt that it was not religion but morality which most conduced to the happiness of men. Nor was he misled by the fallacy that if it were not for religion there would be none. It was clear to him that the morality which was the outcome of fear was no morality at all, and that the less account was taken of religion the more attention must be given to rational and sensible morality. Subtract from this life all consideration of another, and how infinitely more momentous does this life become? how much more terrible its sins—how much more deplorable its miseries? How much more important, too, that we

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should make the best of it, and get the most out of it? Abandon the idea of a deity presiding over it and looking after it, and how much greater becomes man's responsibility? To Ernest it had become painfully evident that the tendency of religion was to influence men by supernatural dreams and visionary terrors, the effect of which was to cloud reason and obscure the truth. Religion seemed to him to hinder, not to help morality, by substituting in its place a morbid piety which made men act on creeds instead of principles. He saw religion need not do this, but he saw it did it.

The attitude of the church appeared to Ernest to be exactly typified by the position of that same St. Clement Danes whose chime he had so often listened to. Alas, it has grown very feeble of late years,

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and does not sound at all like “oranges and lemons.” But the church stands where it stood — plump in the middle of the Strand—blocking the progress of humanity —and just a little bit athwart it. Its stolid mass confronts the traffic of the world. It cannot stop men, but it forces them to make a detour round it. A venerable church, about which a thousand old associations cluster, and which Ernest would have missed as much as any one. A church which every one is loth to lay rude hands upon, but which the patience of mankind will not endure for ever, and whose fate is written on its forehead.

Moreover, his morality was in some respects what the world would stigmatise—what he himself, when first we knew him, would have stigmatised—as immorality. But time, experience, and thought had

much disturbed the calm complacency of his opinions; and the confidence of Mr. Grey had dealt the final blow to his conventional ideas. He felt the foolishness of all his old uncharities. He saw that though society could not dispense with forms, not all the laws which ever were, nor all the customs of society, could consecrate a union where love was not or desecrate one where it was. He saw that what the world called virtue absolutely manufactured and necessitated what the world called vice. He felt that whilst it was a very comfortable creed for those who profited by its decree, their happiness was purchased with the woe of those who suffered by it; and he could not help but shudder at the fierce contempt which he saw visited on those unfortunates who, not from any special fault of theirs, fall victims to the exigencies

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cies of a social state not founded upon truth.

You must have noticed, reader, how society is often harder on a breach of human laws than on a breach of laws divine. And there is a reason for it. Neglected and abused as are the laws of God, their root is planted in the depths of nature. The instincts of mankind are in their favour—the temptation to infringe them is comparatively small—and when they are infringed they can avenge themselves, and do, with terrible effect. The laws of man upon the contrary are pure conventions, having no foundation in “the everlasting yea”—are often inconsistent with it, and indeed in open opposition to it—the temptation to infringe them is tremendous; and if their breach were not avenged by man it would not be avenged at all—for nature does not care

a fig for their observance—and the sinner would escape scot-free. The only way in which poor man can get his laws observed is by inflicting penalties upon their breach.

He saw, too, that infractions of the world's morality—so far as it relates to the connections between men and women—were assaults upon the very base on which conventional society is founded, and were therefore visited by that society with its severest punishment and savagest uncharity. But though he saw its cruelty was thus explained, he also saw it was not justified.

He has not found out “what is good for man in this vain life.” He feels, as he has always felt, that how to do humanity the slightest good is just the problem which appears to be the simplest and which is the most profound. But he has come to the conclusion that the safest way of doing the

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most good and the least harm, is not to build a church, endow a hospital, or do what are considered “works of charity,” but just to go through life discharging one’s own duties faithfully, doing one’s own work thoroughly, regarding others kindly—whether they be saints or sinners—judging men’s lives very broadly, and putting the best possible construction upon actions which one cannot understand.

And though he cannot carry out his own conviction, he is quite of the opinion of the Preacher that there is no greater vanity than melancholy; and that “a man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry.” Misery is a mistake. Youth can afford to be romantically melancholy. It has its life before it, and it can find a certain dismal pleasure in a sentimental woe. But middle age has far

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too much to do to waste its time in that way ; and old age is much too near its grave to lose what little opportunity of happiness remains. It doesn't sound a very glorious consummation, but it is sensible enough—the older men grow, the fonder they get of their stomachs.

Yes, let us be happy when we can. Of course, behind our happiness and jollity the awful cruelties of nature and the frightful miseries of men for ever stand—a death's-head at the feast ; but let them stand there—well behind—truths not to be ignored, but not to be for ever scrutinised. Let us go on cheerfully, if it be possible ; holding our opinions, sorrows, happiness, dislikes, and even loves, all lightly—ready to abandon them at any moment. Let us eat our bread with joy, and drink our wine with a merry heart.

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But most of all has Ernest learnt that man is but a mass of momentary moods—that his intensest joys and his profoundest griefs are but the matter of a minute—that the generations dance across the screen of life like figures shadowed by a magic-lantern—and that life itself is but a breath upon a glass—the “vanity of vanities.” Only the earth abides, and sun, and moon, and stars—to work out those eternal purposes which man will never know.

Ernest was sitting in a cloud of smoke reflecting on these vanities, when a brisk step came bounding up the stairs—click went the letter-box—and a long narrow piece of paper tumbled in. He took it in his hands and looked at it, and turned it over, and then looked at it again with wondering eyes. It was a brief !

He had been wrestling for the last two years with the profoundest mysteries of life ; he had been solving some of nature's most perplexing problems ; he had been passing through the stormiest period of his existence ; he had had all love of life well-nigh crushed out of him—and it had just struck some attorney, longer-sighted than his kind, that he might possibly have brains enough to work a guinea brief !

He flung it on the floor, and stamped upon it. Two years ago it would have made him dance with joy. He did not want it now. His interest in life was gone. He couldn't be bothered with other men's affairs. Pshaw ! let them take their brief to Blenkinsop !

Smoke a pipe, Ernest, and then—pick it up. It is the first of many that are on their way. You have passed over the rough

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bar, and now are on the ocean. Your interest in life will come again. You will concern yourself with other men's affairs. You will get almost swallowed up in them. A long life lies before you. You will slave and fight for trifles, like the rest of men. You will succeed. And in the vulgar labours and successes of your middle age, the fret and anguish of your nobler youth you "shall not much remember."

He picked it up, and took it to the window, and sat down to read it. St. Clement Danes was singing "oranges and lemons" in the Strand. The fountain was drip-dropping in the Temple garden. The sun was shining on the river, and the river was streaming on.

THE END.





